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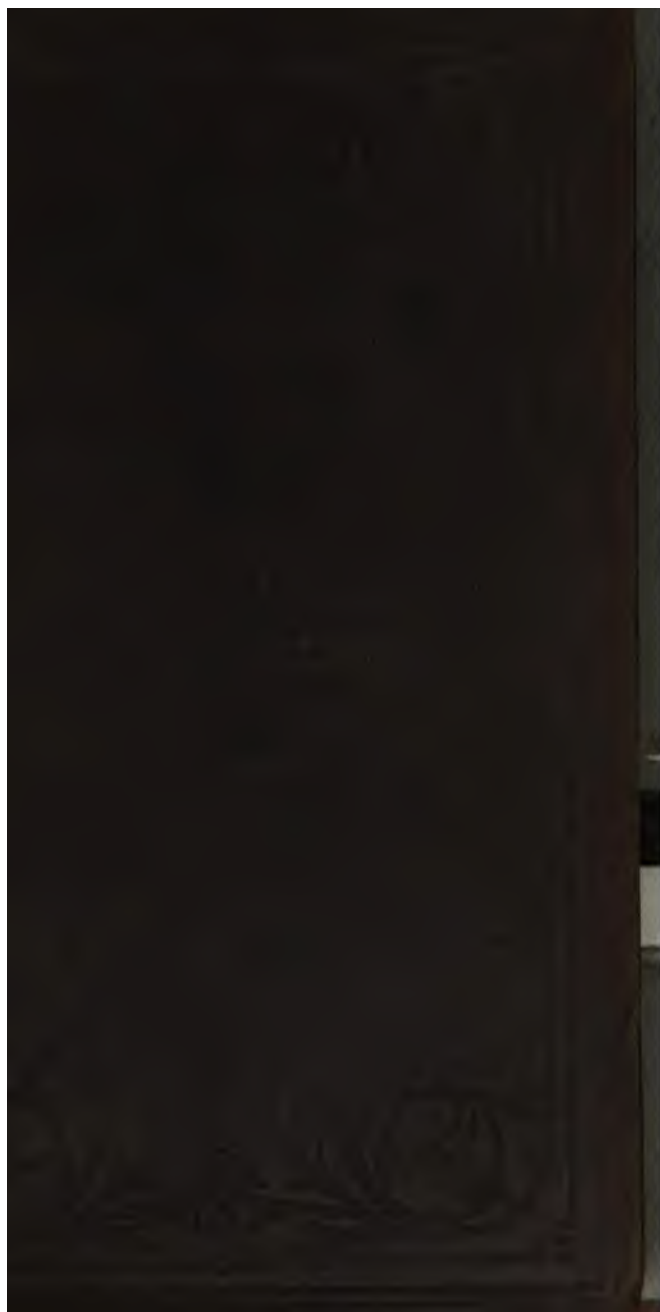
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PARISH SERMONS,

AS PREACHED

FROM HIS OWN PULPIT,

BY THE

REV. JAMES ASPINALL, M.A.

RECTOR OF ALTHORPE, LINCOLNSHIRE,

AUTHOR OF "SERMONS DOCTRINAL AND PRACTICAL,"

"OCCASIONAL SERMONS,"

"ROSCOE'S LIBRARY ; OR, OLD BOOKS AND OLD TIMES," &c. &c.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND
FATHER IN GOD,
THE LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN,
THIS VOLUME OF SERMONS
IS,
WITH HIS PERMISSION,
RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,
BY HIS OBEDIENT SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR



P R E F A C E.

IN describing a journey from London homewards, I lately wrote, "We flew past Peterborough with its modest cathedral, Boston with its beautiful old church-tower, and Lincoln with its magnificent cathedral crowning the hill above the city, in all the climax of beauty and perfection of art. It always strikes me, as I travel by railway, and see the country studded and dotted over, reticulated, as it were, by churches, tower and spire, advancing and receding, one rising before your view as another disappears from it, that surely those who possess such a vantage-ground, can only lose it by their own fault, weakness, or folly. Gibraltar itself might be surprised with a slumbering or treacherous garrison." To avert such a consummation, therefore, every

individual of that garrison should be untiringly vigilant and active at his post, doing all he can, in every way, and according to the talent given to him, be it ever so little, to spread and propagate and strengthen the knowledge of "the Truth as it is in Jesus." Hence this volume of Sermons. They are "cast upon the waters" with the humble hope and prayer that they may meet with a class of readers whom, with the divine blessing, they may draw and attach more firmly to our Holy and Scriptural Church and to the soul-saving Word of Life which she declares to her followers.

In these Sermons I have only endeavoured to be plain-spoken and out-spoken. I have carefully avoided any thing like even an approach to that fashion of preaching which seems, if I may so say, to delight in administering poison for the very sake, as it were, of testing and proving the virtues and power of an antidote. The first charge which I ever heard was from Bishop Law, at that time presiding over the diocese of

Chester. In one part of it, alluding to a practice then very general in the pulpit, and addressing himself particularly to the younger Clergy, he advised them especially to avoid the too common inclination of the preachers of the day to quote largely from infidel writers for the sake of a little self-display in the effort to refute them, "for," the good prelate added with the most pointed emphasis, all the more telling from the simplicity in which it was clothed, "it will sometimes happen that your hearers will remember and treasure up the quotation in their minds long after they have forgotten your refutation." *Mutatis mutandis*, with a little variation of language, it does appear to me that the same wise counsel might be addressed at the present time to those preachers who, revelling in the love of paradox, warn their hearers to beware of what they call "the horrid doctrines of repentance and good works;" and then go on to say that they do not use this frightful and startling phraseology to express its plain and proper and natural

meaning, but simply to guard human pride against looking upon repentance and good works as meritorious causes of salvation which is due to "Christ crucified" alone. And what is very frequently the consequence of such a misuse of language? The preachers themselves, carrying the thread or clue in their own heads, escape from the labyrinth of paradox in which they have been wandering, but they too often leave the ignorant and unlearned among their hearers lost and bewildered in its intricacies and mazes. The faint explanation is forgotten. The strong assertion is remembered. With some the difficulty raised is too stupendous to be overcome, too perplexing to be unravelled. They brood over it until, in many instances, a paralysis of all religion follows. Others, the worldling and the wicked, are only too glad to hear of, and accept in its literal sense, the language which speaks of "the horrid doctrines of repentance and good works." They look no farther. They do not want to look any farther. They seek no expla-

4. nation. They will listen to none. They are satisfied to draw encouragement for their own sinful courses from what they have heard. And thus in either case such preaching is very dangerous; it misleads souls.

I am equally far removed from all sympathy with those teachers who make it everlastingly their delight and employment to forge and hurl the thunderbolts of controversy. I do not think that any good has ever, and I am quite sure that much evil has often, been wrought by preachers of this class. And, moreover, I do not like to see the minister of the Gospel descend as a gladiator into the arena of strife, or become a mere polemical artilleryman in the batteries of disputation. The generality of our hearers, the poor to whom the Gospel should be preached, require to be fed with good wholesome spiritual food, and not to be put upon a meagre controversial diet which, however stimulating it may be, has nothing substantial and nourishing in it. They should be taught the inseparable connexion between a Christian faith and a

Christian life. They should be instructed in the heavenly precepts delivered for their guidance by their Lord and Master. They should be fortified against the trials of their earthly pilgrimage by the comforts and consolations, the hopes and promises, set forth in the inspired page. Do not, however, let me be misunderstood while so speaking. There are times when the truth must be maintained, upheld, and explained against all its assailants. There are seasons, to be left to the choice of the judicious preacher, when the pure and holy doctrines of our Church must be enforced by all the eloquence which we can command, by all the arguments which we can draw from the armoury of reason, and all the proofs which we can accumulate from the Scriptures. But what I would protest against, is that spirit of controversy *en permanence*, if I may so define it, which, trampling upon all charity, seeks only to erect its own altars upon the ruins of those of others, tries to magnify and exalt its own doctrines by continual assaults upon as many as differ

from them, and never ceases, however out of season, to surround itself with the din and dust and noise of strife and battle. Its object is to make men bigots, but it does not condescend even to strive to win them to be Christians. If it can only persuade them to be strictly orthodox according to its views, it is satisfied to leave them very heretics in their hearts and lives. I like not this style of preaching. It is as dangerous as that to which I before alluded.

One other word, and I have done. In it I would speak of the cry, "The Church is in danger." This cry came thundering into my ears in my earliest childhood, at the farthest point to which my memory goes back. I heard it in my youth. I hear it yet, but now happily at more distant intervals, and uttered in a more feeble voice, like the dying whisper of a receding storm which was once upon us in its fury. Not but that it still has many enemies, and is exposed to much hostility. They are not, however, strong enough to arrest the pro-

gress and growth of its influence. We see churches and schools springing up in hitherto neglected districts and localities. We find the increased zeal of the Clergy every where responded to by the increased affection of the people. So that, whatever may be the force of the enmity arrayed against our Holy and Apostolical Church, we may joyfully, with Galileo recanting his recantation, exclaim, "It moves for all that." Yes! "it moves for all that," and will move, "like the thunder-cloud streaming against the wind," spreading and to spread, triumphing and to triumph, the standard-bearer of Divine Truth, the faithful interpreter of the Divine Word, if there is no relapse on the part of the Clergy into the apathy and slumber of the last century. Such a relapse I do not anticipate. I see no signs of it. There is an awakening earnestness on every side which it is delightful to behold. The garrison is becoming truly vigilant and active. The Church is *not* in danger. Our Zion is secure.

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SERMON I.

THE TWO HARVESTS.

MATTHEW xiii. 30.

“Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

IN the contemplation of the present season of the year, the time of harvest, we recognise at once a blessing and a warning. The blessing should excite thankfulness; the warning should induce preparation. We will consider both—the blessing first.

Harvest-time has ever been a period of joy and gladness to the heart of man, crowning the hopes of the year with its

fruits and produce. The husbandman has sown, it may be, in doubt; has watched over his crops, it may be, with varying feelings, through sunshine and rain, through heat and cold, through fair weather and foul. But now he has his reward. The harvest is ready; gather it in, and be satisfied, thankful, and happy. We may not wonder, as we gaze upon the busy and exciting scene of getting in the harvest, that it has been the theme of the poet, and that the painter has employed his art upon it. Even the Scripture condescends to speak of a season so interesting to man. It does so in many allusions in many places, and more at large, and beautifully and delightfully more at large, in the book of Ruth. And truly it is a season to command all our interest, awaken all our love, and inspire all our souls with admiration, adoration, thankfulness, and joy. I know not a more delicious luxury than a walk in the country in the time of harvest. Behold the picture: the golden corn now ripe for the sickle, now cut and in the sheaf; the reapers at their work, men, women, and

children, with their glad, bright, ruddy, beaming faces, with no marks of either time or care upon them yet, all afield busily employed; the blue sky above smiling upon their occupation; a happy excitement in every countenance; the strength of the labourer at its full stretch; the master joining in the toil, and making a pleasure of it; the gleaners at their occupation, and, let us hope, the farmer not forgetting them; the waggons hurrying to and fro, like conquerors bearing off in triumph the spoils and trophies of the year; the stacks, those symbols of plenty in the land, starting up almost as by a miracle in the farm-yard, and every one of them a voice from God, a speaking monument and memorial of God's goodness, of God's providence, of God's thoughtfulness for man in thus blessing his labours, and giving him a return for all his toils.

This is, indeed, the blessing which I spoke of; but I also said that it should excite thankfulness. We shall have no doubters upon that point among Christian men when we recollect who is the Lord

of the seasons, who holds rain and fair, heat and cold, sunshine, storm, and tempest in his hand, and sends them or withholds them at his will and pleasure. The husbandman may plough, he may sow, he may plant, he may weed, he may water,—but, after that, he has done every thing which he can do, except watch, and hope, and PRAY. All the rest is in the hands of God. For, as his own Scripture tells us, “It is God that giveth the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing; neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” When man has done his best, when he has exercised all his skill in the cultivation of his land, when he has added science to labour, and called in every improvement and discovery to his aid, blight, mildew, a storm, a worm or an insect too small for his eye to detect it, may baffle all his efforts, and consume or blast, in spite of his greatest care, the fruit of all his toil. It is God alone who can guard him from all these dangers, and, when he is guarded from them, he ought to draw nigh to God with a heart full of

praise, and thanksgiving, and love, and gratitude. Do not say, "My cleverness, my superior skill, my able management, my more excellent farming, have wrought these good and great results for me. I owe them to myself, and they are due to me as my reward." Be not so mistaken. You owe them to God. All the advantages which you possess over your more ignorant or more careless fellows, might have been scattered, like so many feathers by the wind, before the breath of the divine displeasure. Your advantages are only advantages over other men; they do not extend to the control of the seasons, that belongs to God's dominion. Be thankful, then, to Him for the harvest with which He has crowned your efforts. Be thankful to Him for those very advantages of which you are inclined to boast, and for having enabled you to turn them to your gain and profit.

But you have not only to be thankful to God as the Lord and giver of the harvest, but as the giver of every good gift which you have in your possession. Your health,

your strength, life itself, and the means of supporting and enjoying them,—all, indeed, of whatever kind, which you have, and hold, and love, and prize, are given to you by your Almighty Father, and are only yours by a tenure which He may prolong or shorten at his pleasure.

These, however, are only temporal blessings. The Christian's heart has to expand with all the warmth of gratitude towards God for a gift before which all these things fade into very nothingness itself. I speak of the gift of eternal life through the blood of Jesus Christ. Need I enlarge upon this holy of holies, this blessing of blessings, the doctrine of "Christ crucified?" It is the sun, the great central sun, of the Christian system and dispensation. A traveller is benighted and wanders from his road. Darkness is around him; there are precipices, and deep waters, and the roaring of wild beasts on every side of him. But at last the agony of the halting hours is at an end: the morning breaks; the light comes; the danger is past; he is safe. And so it is with the

sinner. He is lost, and in danger of perishing in the night and darkness of iniquity. All is black and terrible before his view. He seems to be without help, without hope. Despair and death appear to be his certain portion. But hark ! "the things which are impossible with man are possible with God." There are voices in the air and in the heart which proclaim, "Fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." There is light in the east. "The day-spring from on high" is dawning. "The Sun of righteousness," which has "arisen with healing on his wings," stands revealed before him in all the fulness of his ineffable love and glory. With faith he approaches Calvary, and throws himself at the foot of the cross. It is enough. The might of the crucified One is too strong for the powers of darkness, and the sinner lost becomes through his atonement a sinner saved. But I will not, I need not, dwell upon this jewel of Christ's love. Words would only overlay its beauty, and be like some too elaborate setting, encum-

bering and disfiguring the gem which it was intended to adorn.

But we have not got to the end of God's spiritual mercies yet. The scheme of salvation places before us, as it were, man here and Christ there, with a great gulf between them. In this picture man is but as the wretched passenger in a sinking ship, with the roaring breakers between him and the land which is in view. But here again God is our Helper and Friend, and establishes another claim upon our gratitude. The Spirit of grace is ever ready to help our infirmities, to listen to our prayers, and change and purify our hearts. Under his holy and blessed influence the sinner is won from darkness to light, from death to life, is converted and becomes what the Scripture emphatically and beautifully calls "a new creature." He no longer hears of Christ with indifference, as the Saviour of other men, but not of himself. Grace has rescued him from the withering power of such doubts; it has taught him that Christ is his Saviour also; it has quickened in him hope, and

trust, and faith; it has guided and supported him to his Lord. Let him be thankful for the good work, and pray that it may go on.

Moreover, at the beginning of this discourse it was said, that in the contemplation of the present season we recognise a warning as well as a blessing. The harvest which now is, is the type of the terrible harvest which shall be gathered in on the last great day of judgment. You are the reapers now; you will be the reaped then. It is upon this future harvest that Jesus Christ fixes our attention in the text. "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." And a little farther on, in the same chapter, at the solicitation of his disciples, our Lord thus fully explains the parable from which the text is taken: "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the king-

dom ; but the tares are the children of the wicked one ; the enemy that sowed them is the devil ; the harvest is the end of the world ; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire ; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

We have here a fearful picture of the great harvest of souls which shall be on the day of judgment. But let not the sinner deceive himself on this subject. Terrible as will be the punishment of sin in the next world, it has likewise bitter fruits for more immediate plucking. Retribution does not wait for eternity—it begins in time. Neglected duties are sure to come home again sooner or later. They are like birds which, scattered in all direc-

tions in the morning, always return to roost in the same trees at night. I have heard the worldling, the man given over to and devoted to the world, its gains, its vanities, its pleasures, its follies, wonder that happiness is a stranger to his breast, that his heart should be heavy within him, and that those deep ploughers, time and care, should have ploughed such tremendous furrows on his brow. He knew not that happiness was not a plant produced by the soil of this world, but a graft from heaven, of heavenly origin and heavenly growth. He knew not that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God;" and that it is written in that Book which never deceives, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." I have heard the drunkard and the dissipated marvel that they feel old while yet they are young; that their sun of life seems to be going down while it ought still to be day with them; that their health is shattered, their constitution broken, their strength gone. Well, it is their own work. As they have sown, so they are reaping.

These things are the natural pains and penalties of their misdeeds. They cannot offer their youth and health upon the altars of intemperance and vice, and expect to retain them still. I have heard the dishonest and the utterer of falsehood expressing their astonishment that they are neither trusted nor believed, forgetting that the past colours the future of a man's life; and that character is like one of those fabrics which are of so delicate a texture that they perish in the handling; and that no one likes to confide in or take the word of him by whom he has been once robbed or deceived. I have heard parents complain of the ingratitude and neglect of their children, without ever thinking that their faulty education of them, bringing them up "as without God in the world," made them what they are. I have heard masters talk of the little love and respect felt for them by their servants, when, all the time, they have never looked upon them as any thing but so many machines, out of whom they were to get so much work for so much wages, without

ever thinking of them as fellow-men, as beings with immortal souls, and, for the sake of those souls, having a claim upon them for Christian love, interest, anxiety, and care. And I have heard servants speak of having hard and expecting masters, when they have never done any thing to make them otherwise, just, but hardly, and perhaps not that, performed their daily work, but never displaying any of that fervour of zeal, that enthusiasm of fidelity, which it is so delightful to behold evinced by the employed in behalf of the employer. And so we go on through all classes of men who are not acting from Christian motives and Christian influences, and still find that there is a canker at the heart, planted there and kept there by the very absence of such motives and influences. The reason, we have already seen, is plain. The peace of God will not dwell with the enemies of God: they must look for their reward from their own master.

But I said that the warning contained in the contemplation of the present season of the year, as a type of the great harvest

of souls at the last day, should induce preparation. What is preparation? It is to be at all times ready for what may at any time happen. In the affairs of this world you know very well what it means. When the sun shines and the weather is fine you are ready to get in your crops. If a great bargain is offered to you, you are ready to take advantage of it. If a dear friend sends a message to say that he is about to visit you, you are ready to receive and welcome him. Now it is exactly this habit of being always ready, that you should carry from things temporal into things spiritual and eternal. Death is uncertain, and may arrive at any moment. Are you prepared to face it, should it come upon you soon and unexpectedly? Try yourselves on this point by a few home questions. Are you under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Is your faith in Christ Jesus a true, genuine, earnest, Christian faith, carrying you on to love Him who has loved you so tenderly and well? Does it lead you to abhor that sin which it required such a tremendous sacrifice to

atone for? Are your Sabbaths spent as Christian Sabbaths? Do you abstain from the world's works on the Lord's day? Is the Gospel your unfailing rule of life during the week? What do you say to these questions? Can you answer them favourably for your souls? Or are you floating along, part and parcel of that great, vast, huge accumulation of human driftwood, swept away by the current of worldliness, to be stranded on the shores of the realms of eternal night? It may be, however, that instead of giving a direct answer to these inquiries, you will strive to fence with them. You will perhaps talk, as other sinners have done before you, of to-morrow, of some other time, of a more convenient season. But have you any covenant with death? Have you any certainty of seeing that to-morrow, of living to that other time, that more convenient season, from which you promise to-day that you will date your conversion to Christ? But the very talk of delay proves that there is no faith in Christ, no love of Christ, in your hearts and souls.

You are not his true disciples yet. The world has you in its captivity.

Others will, perhaps, confess, "We see and know all our danger, but what can we do to escape from it? It is easier to go down hill than up hill. It is easier to plunge more deeply into sin than to extricate ourselves from it. Our passions are stronger than our resolutions. We cannot resist them. Why were we made thus weak?" Stop. Listen while I speak to you. In all that you have urged there is cause for humility, but not for despair. You ask, How can you escape from the danger which surrounds your souls? I tell you, by turning to Jesus Christ in all the fulness of faith, and by carrying all your wants and need and spiritual necessities and pitiable case to the foot of his cross. You ask, How you can escape from your passions, which are stronger than your resolutions? I tell you, by turning to God in prayer; not cold, formal, unmeaning words, the outpouring of feigned lips, but the gushing warmth of a heart which has listened to the prevent-

ing grace of God, and is supplicating for larger and larger supplies of the Divine help. You ask, Why you were made thus weak? I tell you, that God's glory might be magnified and exalted by turning your weakness into strength through the working of his Holy Spirit. All excuses then set apart, pray that you may henceforth become, truly and indeed, disciples of your Lord and Master. Prayer will bring grace. Grace will fill your hearts with Christian faith. Faith will be the staff on which you will lean in your approach to Christ. And Christ will be the Rock on which you will rest your salvation. Yes! these are the spiritual stages to the soul's salvation—Prayer, Grace, Faith, CHRIST. If you do not already love this great and only Saviour of the soul, pray that you may begin now. If you do love Him, pray that you may love Him more and more. And pray likewise that you may love on through every trial and temptation, so that when the last and awful day of harvest shall arrive, and the angel-reapers be sent forth, and the tares separated from the

wheat, and the everlasting doom be pronounced on all, and "the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," you may be found to be of their blessed number for Christ's sake. Pray for such a consummation. Let us all pray for it.

SERMON II.

REPENTANCE.

MATTHEW iii. 1, 2.

“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

WE value evidence according to the character, and integrity, and supposed bias and motives of the witness. If the witness be a person of character and integrity, although he may not be disinterested, but his interest, and bias, and motives, and evidence go together, still men of a charitable disposition and a Christian frame of mind will accept his testimony. But as human nature, generally speaking, is not

of a charitable disposition, is not of a Christian frame of mind, there will, in this case, always be people who, taking the bias and motives into the account, will weigh the evidence in the scales of doubt and suspicion. If, however, the witness, known to be a person of character and integrity, is known also to be thoroughly disinterested, without bias or motives on either side of the question on which he is called to give evidence, then will his statements be universally accepted. But if, farther, the witness, a person of character and integrity, is not disinterested, but his interest, and bias, and motives go one way, and the evidence which he gives goes another, against himself, as it were, in human estimation, in direct contradiction and opposition to the promptings and impulses of selfishness, then do we seem to have "made assurance doubly sure," and to have obtained a perfection of testimony which nothing can overturn, nothing can shake, nothing can even impugn or arraign. The witness is unassailable on every side. It is in this last class of witnesses, the

most credible of all, that we shall presently find that we must place John the Baptist, when we consider the evidence which he gave in favour of the truth of Jesus Christ, and, consequently, of the truth of Christianity.

In the first place, it was said that character and integrity were requisites to make a man a credible witness. That John possessed these, all writers about him agree. This point has never been doubted or questioned. Now, then, for the second test affirmed, his bias, motives, and interest in human estimation. In which direction did they lie? We know what were the longings, and feelings, and wishes of the Jews at the time when "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," was heard, and the Baptist entered upon his mission, "preaching and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The nations of the earth were at that period in general expectation of the appearance of some great one in the world. Tradition, derived

from ancient prophecy, had led to this state of mind. But the Jews especially were unsettled and anxious, eager and hopeful on this subject. They knew that "the fulness of time" was come, and were constantly looking for the arrival of the Messiah and Saviour announced and promised in their Scriptures. But unfortunately they had adopted a false view of his character. Galled to the quick, feeling the yoke of their Roman masters as the very iron in their souls, they anticipated the arrival among them of a temporal prince and deliverer, who, inscribing liberty on his banner, should drive out the strangers, and elevate their country to the pride, and power, and place, in the scale of nations, which it occupied under David and Solomon. Any pretender or impostor assuming such a character would have been instantly and heartily welcomed, and the sword drawn at once, and without hesitation, in his behalf. Accordingly, as the fame of the Baptist, and his sayings, and his doings, and his preachings spread farther and farther, and were more and

more heard of and talked of, it was into this current that the thoughts of the Jews began to flow. Who was he? what had he come for? was he the expected Messiah, the coming Prince, the promised Deliverer? who? what? St. Luke thus briefly and emphatically describes the anxious and unsettled state of mind with which men turned their eyes to John: "The people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not." Had he been a man of a worldly spirit, under the influence of pride and ambition, now was his opportunity, here was his temptation,—a bright, and glittering, and dazzling prospect for human selfishness. Could he resist? One word seemed all that was between him and the throne of a glorious kingdom. One word, and thousands and tens of thousands of swords would have leaped from their scabbards, and victory been struggled for, and blood been shed in all the land, from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. But that word was not spoken. John refused to listen to the

solicitations of human vanity and selfishness; he was deaf to the calls and impulses of human bias and motives. Hear him as he speaks to the keen and anxious men whose eager enthusiasm only waited for him to resolve its doubts and to kindle it into a blaze. "He said unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and He will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable." And, again, in the third chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, we have this remarkable passage: "And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the

Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." The Baptist had already recognised the Messiah and his mission in the celebrated confession, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and the language which he here uses is quite consistent with this confession. There is no savour of rebuked pride or affected humility about it. It speaks, says, breathes nothing of mortified ambition or crushed hopes, but has the clear ring of pure and genuine truth, and real and actual gladness. "His joy," he says, "is fulfilled;" not because he, John, was universally sought after, and followed, and listened to, but because "all men came" to another, to Jesus Christ. He does not seek to glorify himself, but knows and admits that his part was but that of the morning star, which, however bright and brilliant

when darkness is around, disappears and passes from our view when the sun appears in the glorious east and shines forth in all its splendours. "He," Christ, he says, "must increase, but I," John, "must decrease." I am only, and shall only be remembered as, his forerunner, the herald of his coming. My disciples will pass from me to Him. After Him, not after me, will the new religion about to be established in the world be called. By Him, not by me, will the work of man's salvation be accomplished. But do I grieve at his elevation and my depression in human eyes? No! I acknowledge it, I proclaim it, I preach it, I rejoice in it. "My joy is indeed fulfilled." It is the crowning consummation and success of my mission. I sought, I seek nothing else; nothing for my own glory, nothing for my own fame, nothing for my own advantage, nothing, nothing for myself. I am but "the voice crying in the wilderness;" but in Him "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Such was the evidence given by the Baptist in favour of

the truth of Christ; and, given under the circumstances which have been described, we must all allow that if ever there was a witness in any case with resistless claims upon our belief, it was John, the giver of this evidence. It is unassailable, impregnable. It is upon a rock which no wave of criticism, cavil, doubt, scepticism, or infidelity can move. It is, in short, testimony in its perfection.

But now let us confine ourselves more closely to the text. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."—"Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repent; hasten to renounce your sins and amend your lives, that you may be fit to become members of that spiritual kingdom which is about to be proclaimed and established in this world, and which, beginning here, will hereafter endure, purer, brighter, from everlasting to everlasting, in God's heaven. "Repent!" What is repentance? This ought to be thoroughly understood, seeing that it is a

necessary and indispensable mark of a true discipleship to Jesus Christ. Observe well and ponder over the words which I have used. I said that repentance was a necessary and indispensable mark of a true discipleship to Jesus Christ; a mark of discipleship recollect, but not a meritorious cause of salvation. Salvation is the work of Jesus Christ, and of Him alone. A man is not saved by repentance, but he cannot be saved without repentance. And now for an answer to the question which was asked above, What is repentance? Some will tell you that it is a cessation from sin; some will call it sorrow for sin; and others will define it to be a determination, as far as in man lies, never to sin again. But the word by which it is expressed in Scripture signifies all this, and much more. It would more properly be translated a *change of mind*; such a thorough and complete change, by the blessing of God, that the sinner not only ceases from sin, but ceases to have any pleasure in the thought of it; is not only sorry for and bitterly regrets the transgressions of

his past life, but is anxious and careful to avoid them for the future ; and is determined farther, by the same Divine blessing, to adorn for the rest of his days that holy Gospel and profession of Christianity which hitherto he has disgraced and disfigured: Let me make all this plain to you by an illustration which will be familiar to every mind. We will suppose that a master sends his servant on some important business, or with some particular message, to a place lying in a southerly direction. As soon as he is out of sight, the careless or disobedient servant sets off towards the north at a rapid pace, as if anxious to get as fast and as far as possible from his master and his work. But after a time better thoughts creep into his mind, and he begins to feel that he is doing evil. He stops, and no longer goes in the wrong direction. Is that enough? No! It is something if it leads to something more ; but it is not enough. After a little hesitation and deliberation, wilfulness pulling him one way and a conviction of error the other, he turns round and now has his face,

at all events, set in the right direction. Is that enough? No! It is something if it leads to something more; but it is not enough. There is another pause, another inward struggle, and then, at last, the conviction that he has been doing wrong grows stronger and stronger within him, until it becomes overwhelming and irresistible, and, no longer standing still, no longer merely sorrowing for his disobedience, he hastens, runs, speeds upon his way towards the point to which he was originally sent, eager, to use a scriptural phrase, "to redeem the time," and to get his master's business transacted, or his message delivered, without the loss of another moment. And this is an exact picture of what man, as a penitent servant before God, has to do for his heavenly Master. He must no more walk in the path which leads towards sin. He must turn his back upon and loathe it and hate it. And, moreover, as the proof of the sincerity of these feelings, he must press forward in the way of Christian righteousness, striving, struggling, praying that, during the rest of his life, he may be

as bright an example of a true disciple, as before he had been a leader and captain among the wicked. Such a change in a man we can accept as sincere and genuine repentance, but nothing less.

But when we preach the doctrine of repentance to our flocks, we have a mighty and terrible enemy to contend with in that pride which occupies so large a space of the human heart. All men will listen to and receive the doctrine generally. But the difficulty begins when we would close with them and press the lesson of self-application. That is the signal for resistance. Every one sees the necessity of repentance for others ; but every one will not admit it in his own case. Many connect repentance with the idea of gross and glaring and outrageous transgressions against the laws of God, and then thank heaven that they are not stained with such offences. "What have we to repent of?" they ask, in all the triumph of self-satisfaction. "We have never killed. We have never stolen. We lead regular and decent lives. What have we done? What have

we to repent of?" But when men talk in this way, it is plain that they take a very superficial view of their own spiritual state and condition. They never include in the account at all the ten thousand times ten thousand offences which they are daily, hourly, continually committing, what they probably would call little sins (but there are no little sins in the sight of God) or no sins; their lack of charity in thought, word, and deed; their forgetfulness that property is a stewardship; their deafness to the cry of poverty; their carelessness about the spread of the Gospel; their neglect of their children's education; their substitution of dead formalism for vital Christianity; their looking for and magnifying the mote in their neighbour's eye; their encouragement of idle talk and scandal; their general tone of conversation; their eagerness to stand well with what we may term the worldly portion of the world; their fear of the ridicule of the scorner and sinner; their silence in the presence of such persons, when they ought to have been most outspoken in defence of their

assailed religion, flying like cowards to the rear, when duty calls them to the van and forefront of the battle. No, no! Repentance can never be idle for want of work. Even in the case of the best of men it has an ever-returning task to perform, which can only be accomplished by the help of the divine grace.

But there is yet another point of view in which we must look seriously at the subject which we are considering. To the men who have a scheme of their own by which they hope to enjoy all the pleasures of sin as long as possible and then repent at the last moment, I shall only say that they are like idiots who have set their hearts upon a shipwreck in the midst of the wide, wide ocean, and the chance of escape upon a plank. I would protest to rational, reflecting beings against the delay of repentance on another ground. Blessed are they who remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and from the beginning have struggled to live in Christian agreement with their Christian profession. For, although a broken and contrite heart

is not despised; although the prodigal is ever welcomed to his Father's house, when he returns to it in the earnestness of sincere repentance; still, when he is converted himself and brought to Christ and become a true disciple, he must be haunted by pains and penalties, memories and pangs heaped up against him in his season of sin and rebellion; and the more earnest and faithful he becomes, the more bitter and reproachful also will be these tormentors, these stings and scorpions of his own creating. You will understand this readily and at once when I explain my meaning. Let us suppose the case of a sinner converted from the evil of his ways, won and drawn by grace to Christ, a changed, renewed man, made what the Scripture calls "a new creature." Most grateful and most thankful will he be for the divine love which has wrought so mercifully in him and for him. But oh! what regret, what sorrow, what agonies of torture will he ever feel when he thinks of what may be the end of those who were misled by him in his days of sin and iniquity. As the

acorn is said to be the father of forests and fleets, so may his then wicked example be the parent of future generations and generations of sinners. He has repented himself, but will they repent? What will become of the children whose education he neglected, and who followed his footsteps into crime and guilt? What will overtake others, wife, relations, friends, neighbours whom he tempted, as he led the way, into drunkenness, dishonesty, swearing, Sabbath-breaking, or other transgressions against the law of God? He has escaped; but what is to be the fate of all these saplings of vice planted by his hand in the garden of Satan? This is a grief which will last as long as life itself to the converted sinner; and the more sincere his own repentance is, the more heavily will the remembrance of the former spiritual mischief and desolation which he has occasioned press upon him and torment him.

And now once more let me address you in the language of the text: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The next step may carry you from time to eternity. There is, therefore, not a moment to be lost. Seek for strength where alone it can be obtained ; pray ; renounce the evil companions who would laugh you into remaining in sin ; forsake the evil habits which would entangle you, and, like the ivy twisting round the branches of the tree, crush you to destruction. Fear not the world ; fear not man ; fear not envy, that archer with bitter hate, but pointless arrows when it would assail the true Christian. Fear not malice, which will presently die out, suffocated by its own venom. Fear not poverty, which will soon be succeeded by the riches of heaven. Fear not sickness, which is only sent to try and purify your faith. Fear not death, which is the gate and avenue to the presence of the Eternal. Fear God alone, and, fearing Him, love Him, and love and love on, until "perfect love casting out fear," your only happiness may be to do your Lord's will here, and your only hope to dwell with Him in his blessedness hereafter.

S E R M O N I I I .

CHRISTMAS DAY.

LUKE ii. 15.

“ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.”

THE picture-gallery of history, celebrating the achievements of the past from age to age, sets before us many and many a scene of great and glorious deeds, many and many a view of surpassing splendour and magnificence, and many and many an incident of thrilling and exciting interest. Art, in marble or on the canvas, has done its utmost to attract and rivet our

attention and admiration. Fiction, with all the resources of imagination at its command, has laboured unceasingly to dazzle and enthrall our senses by the glowing language and brilliant colouring of its descriptions. But history, art, fiction, all pale, like the stars before the rising sun, and pass away before the truly sublime and sublimely true narration of the greatest event that ever happened in the world, which we find in the chapter from which the text is taken. The fulness of time foretold by the prophets had arrived; the promised Messiah was born at Bethlehem of Judea. The everlasting King, the "Prince of Peace," the Saviour of souls, did not make his appearance in this world, surrounded by the pomp and splendour of an earthly sovereign. His birth did not take place under the shelter of the carved and ceiled roof of some golden or ivory palace, closely watched by guards and statesmen, with thousands and tens of thousands waiting beyond the walls to welcome the event with loud acclaims. There was nothing of this sort. Christ came not

to be a temporal prince, and, therefore, He sought not temporal honours. I said He was born at Bethlehem. It was thus. The taxing of the world by the Roman Emperor Augustus had brought Mary, his mother, to "the city of David," "and so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." In these humble circumstances did the Lord of heaven and earth choose to enter upon his mission of love and mercy. Men, who judge only by outward appearances, recognised Him not; knew Him not. Of all the members of "the house and lineage of David" who were collected together on that awful night, filling the city and occupying the inn, the little infant, born in a stable and cradled in a manger, for want of better accommodation, would probably, by the carelessness or bias of human estimation, have been the last thought of or fixed upon as the

promised and expected Messiah. But "God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are his ways our ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts." Man knew not his Lord. The earth was silent. No human welcome was heard or offered. But there was a more becoming demonstration to mark the grandeur of the occasion. Heaven itself was moved and stirred to celebrate the veiling of the Godhead in the human form. And now for the sublime description of what occurred: the very simplicity of the language in which it is told adds to its sublimity. We read, "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." Not unto kings and potentates, not unto the high and lofty and great ones of the earth, was it first revealed that Christ was born into the world, but unto shepherds, these representatives, as we may call them, of "the poor to whom the Gospel was to be preached." To them, watching over their

flock by night, was made the announcement of heavenly love fulfilled. "Lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." What a spectacle for human eyes to gaze upon! What a message for human ears to listen to! And what a messenger! And what love! What condescension! And then that sweet song of thanksgiving which broke upon the silence of the night, when heavenly voices alone were deemed worthy to hymn the praises of the Lord of glory, taking upon Him his mission as the Lord

of love! Oh! what must be the worth of an immortal soul! and oh! what must be the value of salvation, when the very angels thus leave their lofty habitations to declare their interest in, and raise their thankful and triumphant songs for, the work of mercy which Christ came into the world to undertake and perform!

And here we seem to be driven by the very force of contrast itself to contemplate another picture of God's power which the Bible sets before us, as sublime as that which was exhibited on the plain of Bethlehem, but as terrible in its sublimity as the last was tenderly affecting. I speak of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. The very phrase, the giving of the law, implies pains and penalties and punishments for disobedience to it; and, therefore, it was properly and suitably, and according to the fitness of things, accompanied by terrors intended to make an impression upon the children of Israel. As they gazed upon the mountain, they saw it overspread with clouds and thick darkness. And there was a great fire, and

“the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.” “And there were thunders and lightnings,” and “the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud;” “and when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.” How different, indeed, we may say again, is this picture of the giving of the law from that of the announcement of the birth of Christ; not different in its sublimity, but widely different in its accompaniments—the one the sublimity of terror—the other the sublimity of love! In the one the Eternal seems to address us, “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God;” in the other He speaks to us with all the tenderness of “our Father which is in heaven.” In the one He seems to set before us “the flaming sword” of wrath and judgment; upon the other is inscribed, “God is love”—always love, even when compelled to be most severe, but plainly and specially seen to be so in the scheme of salvation. Make these two pictures companion pictures in

your hearts, my brethren. Contemplate them often and seriously, and with prayer. First look at this, and then at that. Which is most to your liking? Will you brave God in his terrors? or will you approach Him in your need, and throw yourselves, your souls, your care, your wants, your salvation, altogether upon his mercy?

When the shepherds to whom Heaven had spoken thus gloriously and condescendingly had somewhat recovered from the surprise by which they must have been almost overwhelmed in the first instance, they resolved to enter Bethlehem to see and inquire and judge for themselves. "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And

all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."

And here we seem to be brought naturally to consider how far, and in what way, we can and should imitate the example of these shepherds. This is Christmas day, the nativity, the birthday, so to speak, of the Saviour of the world. To us no voice speaks from heaven as it did to them. No angel declares to us the great and grand event. No multitude of celestial beings suddenly appear to dazzle our eyes and delight our enraptured ears with their hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God Most High. But we are not left without witness in the most interesting and most important matter. God's Scriptures are to us what his angels were to the shepherds. As they visited Bethlehem, and with their bodily eyes saw

all the truth of what had been declared to them by the heavenly messenger, so may we, approaching the page of God's Book with the eye of faith, find equal cause for "glorifying and praising" our heavenly Father for his merciful consideration for our souls. Let us open it and see. It tells us all about Christ, all about the cause which led to our want of such a mighty atonement in our behalf, all about the love which induced Him to be the Saviour, and all about the manner in which He fulfilled the great and glorious work which He had undertaken. We learn from it that man was created, tempted, and fell. Driven from Paradise for his sin, he was yet comforted by the divine mercy, even in his hour of agony, by the promise of the Messiah. As time rolled on, this promise was repeated and enlarged and made clearer to the patriarchs. It was prefigured and expressed in various types and ceremonies and sacrifices of the Jewish religion. It was foretold by prophet after prophet, and still in plainer and plainer language as the period

when the Messiah was to enter upon his mission approached. That He was to be of the "house and lineage of David" according to the flesh was predicted. The place and time of his birth, the manner of his life, the awful and fearful character of his death, were all spoken of and declared; so that only the most wilful and resolute obstinacy can hold out against the conviction that the Christ, born as on this day at Bethlehem of Judea, and whose birth the angel proclaimed to the wondering shepherds, was the very Christ of promise, the Christ of prophecy, the Christ foreshadowed by type and sacrifice in the Old Testament.

At this point our thoughts also naturally turn into another channel for a few moments. In this age of strong worldly motives tugging at men's hearts with unusual force, and striving to drag them into the whirl of excitement, we require more than ever a strong counter-motive to pull them in the other direction, and anchor their souls in the quiet waters of peace, on the hope in Christ. When, in truth,

were men so thoroughly devoted to the treasures and pleasures of time as they seem to be at the present moment? We look around us. What do we behold? We find them surrounded by facilities, improvements, and advantages which our forefathers never thought of. And what use do they make of them? Much, in a worldly point of view. We see them taken up with an universal thirst for money, occupied with the universal tumult and bustle of business, hurrying to and fro, flying hither and thither, in the everlasting service of Mammon, the love of pleasure and extravagant habits springing up in all ranks, quiet home habits more and more forsaken, simplicity and economy neglected, society one wide rivalry in its extravagant display of glare and tinsel, frivolity and folly extending their dominion; and all these things turning the head and poisoning the heart, and leading men to regard their souls and their salvation as nothing in comparison, or, more probably, to forget them altogether. With so many motives at work with their com-

bined leverage to draw us in a wrong direction, and with increased power from the circumstances of the times, we do, indeed, as I said before, require more than ever a strong counter-motive to resist and thwart their terrible and dangerous influence. This day supplies us with such a motive; with what, indeed, is the strongest motive which can 'appeal to and dwell within the heart—the love of Christ. When we draw near, with the shepherds, to the manger-cradle in the stable at Bethlehem; when we contemplate the Saviour-God in this state of humiliation—the majesty of the Creator veiled in the form of the creature; when we behold Him here only at the beginning of his earthly ministry and mission in our behalf; when we consider all the rest, his career of poverty, persecution, patience, and endurance, his sorrows and griefs, his bitter agony and cruel death; and when we recollect that all these sufferings were borne and submitted to for our souls, for our salvation, to blot out the stain of sin, to reconcile us to the Father, to satisfy justice, to open

heaven; then, then, in truth, is the love of Christ for poor, fallen, helpless man magnified to the very uttermost of all of which love is capable; and if only, with the blessing of God, a corresponding love for Christ can be awakened, as it ought to be awakened, by the return of this day, with all its accompanying reminiscences and associations, in the heart of man; then, at last, will the power of the world over him be at an end, its attractions cease to allure and dazzle him, and he will turn to Christ in all the warmth of gratitude; yea, indeed, with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. No other motive can work such a change. All other motives are either weak in their nature or transient in their character. Feeble or formal in their effects, they exert no influence. They make no impression on the huge, strong fortress of worldliness erected in the heart of man, its walls cemented by his habits and garrisoned by his affections. But if the love of Christ, recalled and kindled within him by the Holy Spirit, can once gain admission, it will

work and work on until it has undermined, pulled down, and obliterated the old castle of sin. Love will be satisfied with nothing else, and nothing less. It never stops short in its task. It knows nothing about doing its work by halves. Its anxiety, its eagerness, its pleasure, its privilege, are to be engaged in the service of the object upon whom it is fixed. It is ever so. The love of Christ, therefore, will always lead those over whom it reigns to devote themselves to the things which will please Christ. They will, with earnest prayer for the help of the divine grace, study to find out what these things are, and then they will study to perform them.

And now, brethren, let us look at the example of the shepherds on another point. When once they had made up their minds to visit Bethlehem, and test the truth of what the angel had declared to them, we are told that "they came with haste." "They came with haste" to Jesus as soon as ever they heard of Him, whereas it may be that there are some of you who have been hesitating and hesitating during the

length of your whole life, and have not come to Him yet. With the shepherds, moreover, "seeing was believing." But I trust that in your case, after comparing Scripture with Scripture, the New Testament with the Old, fulfilment with promise, accomplishment with prophecy, anti-type with type, faith will be triumphant within you, and "believing will be seeing." The shepherds, farther, after seeing, "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them." And, even so, it is to be hoped that, when you have believed, your whole life will be a hymn to the glory of God, your good deeds the music to which it is set. It is sometimes said that a Christian should act like a Christian man. But I tell you that a Christian will and must act like a Christian man. A Christian and a Christian man are synonymous, are the same thing, one and indivisible. When the Christian ceases to act like a Christian man, he ceases to be a Christian altogether. The shadow departs when the substance is

withdrawn. Both disappear at the same time.

Finally, brethren, before you go hence, let me remind you—but, I trust, your own hearts have anticipated me—that, in keeping Christmas as a joyful festival, a season of holy gladness, gratitude, and thanksgiving, you should also keep it as a season for the exercise of more than your usual charity towards your poorer neighbours. This great day for the soul comes round in the coldest and most inclement period of the year, when, while a man's wants are the greatest, there is the least call for his labour. Now, therefore, is the time for the rich or richer ones of the world to be dispensing food, warmth, and clothing among the poor, the sick, the orphans, and the widows. Believe me, the luxury of charity is a treat which all the money of selfishness cannot buy. The pleasure is always greater to the giver than to the receiver. You will eat the dinner in your own house with a keener relish, if you know that you have also spread the feast on other tables. You

will enjoy the warmth of your own fire with greater zest, after providing the fuel for other grates. You will sleep more soundly in your own comfortable beds by night, after bestowing a blanket upon some shivering and starving fellow-creature to shelter him from the cold. It may be winter outside, but so will it be made summer in your own hearts. Try this good and Christian plan of obtaining happiness at a cheap and easy rate. Try it, brethren; I fear that it has been too little tried hitherto amongst us. Yes! This is Christmas. Spend it in “glorifying and praising God,” and in relieving the wants, softening the wretchedness, and ministering to the comforts of man. Recollect what was the song of the angelic host to the wondering shepherds in the plain of Bethlehem. Accept as your rule and guide the blessed and golden words which then resounded under the starry vault of heaven:—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

SERMON IV.

THE NEW YEAR.

PSALM ciii. 15, 16.

“As for man, his days are as grass : as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more.”

HISTORY has its magnificent and mighty, its instructive and impressive lessons. It is written of an eastern conqueror, that, as he walked through the palace of a prince who had fallen before his arms, listening to his guide's account of its former inhabitants, antiquities, and traditions, he was at last struck down from the vein of triumph which he was tempted to indulge, into more solemn and melancholy feelings;

by observing that every reply of his grey-headed attendant to his questions about things or persons began with the words, "This was—that was—he was." All was of the past. Every body *was*, every thing *was*—so the tale went on, until the mailed warrior, in the crush and wreck of his exultation, was driven to exclaim with a sigh, "Alas! every thing new soon runneth to decay, and of every one that is, it is soon said, he was."

It was a solemn warning, this announcement of the universal epitaph of our race, made at such a time and under such circumstances, to the conqueror, in all the pomp and pride of place and power. And the same lesson is constantly set and kept before the eyes and minds of all the sons of men.

The text proclaims it in a voice as clear as a knell heard through the silence of the night. What does it say to us? Listen. "As for man"—mark these very words—"as for man"—they make no exceptions, no distinctions; they speak of all men alike, the greatest as well as the

least—"as for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." So shortly and so suddenly does the career of man come to an end, full as his thoughts may be of schemes and plots and plans and devices, which centuries upon centuries would not suffice to carry into execution. The plucked rose, the gathered lily, the withered flower—all emblems of decay, are also emblems of human life. The stoutest and the strongest who are here to-day may be gone to-morrow. The wind of death is constantly passing on its way. Whose turn may be next? Who knows? "Be ready."

Again, the trumpet of preparation is sounded in our ears by the very day on which we are now assembled in the House of God. This is the first Sabbath in the new year, the youngest daughter, so to speak, of time; the youngest sister of the old years which are gone. Men generally regard the season as one of festivity and

enjoyment and congratulation. It would be more fitly occupied as a time for solemn recollections and serious thoughts. Let us make it such to-day, and, in doing so, let us cast back our eyes into the wide churchyard of the world, and see what warnings there spring up to tell us of the certainty of death and the uncertainty of life. What do we behold? Graves, coffins, and winding-sheets every where triumphant. During those short twelve months upon which I would fix your attention, the world has seen many changes in the actors upon its strange and curious stage. Kings and their pride and their ambition have gone down to the grave together. Heroes and statesmen and legislators, great and honoured in their day, have been returned as dust to dust. High and lowly, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, teachers and preachers, men of every rank and degree; have passed from the life which now is, into that which is beyond. The man of pleasure has been called away from his pleasures, the man of the world from his worldliness, the

labourer from his labours, the busy from his business. The strong man has been cut down in his strength; the sick taken away from his bed of pain and agony. The old man has left his easy chair by the fireside. The husband no longer returns, after the toils of the day, to cheer his now widowed wife. The cradle of the infant is empty. And many a hearth has been rendered desolate by the loss of those who gathered round it in gladness and joy and hope when the year began.

And what is the sad, sorrowful, but instructive lesson which you ought to draw from the certainty of this ever-present, ever-busy death, thinning the ranks of the human race? It is the old error. You see it, and you do not see it, at the same time. You comprehend and understand it in all its terrible force, when you apply it to the case of others; but you are blind to it, because you wish to be blind to it, in your own. All men readily confess that others are mortal, and wonder at the tenacity with which they cling to this life and its treasures, and the tardy or little or no

preparation which they make for their departure from it. But withal they seem to evade or to fear to face the same conviction for themselves, and go on thoughtlessly and carelessly from day to day, feeding and pleasing their fancy with the notion of their own imaginary immortality, even in the present life. But oh! what fatal thoughtlessness, if it is thoughtlessness! Oh! what unequalled folly, if it is folly! Oh! what tremendous presumption, if it is presumption! Whatever be the cause, the danger is the same. Death is surely the end of life to all alike, to this man as well as to that, to you as well as to your neighbours. A birth is only the forerunner of a death. The cradle and the grave are inseparably connected. No sooner does the infant enter this world of trial and probation, than it seems to be grasped by an invisible hand; it is that of time, which never loosens or relaxes its hold again. On—on—forward—forward it goes; still and ever dragging its unwilling victims towards the end of their earthly career. In vain they would draw

back. It is inexorable. On—on—forward—forward it forces them, through good, through evil, through prosperity, through adversity, through riches, through poverty. New years are reached, old years are left behind ; but still its flight continues—on—on—forward—forward. It never loiters, it never lingers ; there is no pause, no stop ; but continually on—on it keeps, at one untiring, unvarying, appalling speed, until, at last, the edge of the grave is reached. In vain would its captives struggle and strive and wrestle to elude and shake off the grasp which is upon them—down—down into the grave it drags them, and then once more on—on through it into eternity ; and in eternity is judgment—and what will that be ? This is the common lot of all. It may be terrifying to your fears, it may be mortifying to your pride ; but it is the truth. It contains the warning which should be continually present to your hearts and memories, “ Remember that you are mortal.”

Yea, and such thoughts, always, in truth, seasonable, are especially seasonable

at this point of time, which, dividing, as it were, the past from the future, invests them with a peculiar solemnity, seriousness, and strength. Walk, therefore, in the place of tombs; meditate in the graveyard through which you pass in your way to the House of God. What searching and stirring thoughts rise within us as we stand there among the departed dead! What voices, more eloquent than all the sermons ever heard from the pulpit, seem to address us, to warn us, appeal to us, plead with us! What lessons on the vanity of human life are on every side of us! What histories, what memories are contained in those few square yards of land! What hopes, what fears, what plans, what schemes, are there ended! How small a space suffices for the last sleep of whole generations of men, for many an individual for whom the world itself was all too little in the days of his grandeur, magnificence, pride, and ambition! There "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." There Dives and Lazarus lie side by side.

There are the men who have agitated and convulsed countries or neighbourhoods by their plottings and intrigues. There are those who, in their age, have been a torment or a blessing to themselves or others. Here is the grave of the miser who breathed his last breath, still clutching at the gold which he loved as fondly and as keenly as ever. Under that stone moulders the drunkard who was cut off in the midst of the wild frenzy of intoxication. And there, the world of their idolatry and affections passed from their grasp, are the dishonest, the self-seekers, the scorers, the Sabbath-breakers, the lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; called hence, it may be, without a moment for preparation, repentance, or even thought. There, in mournful company, until the world's last blaze, and the call to judgment, sleep wisdom and folly, beauty, youth, age, and manhood; and all the stories of their loves, their hates, their envies, jealousies, and emulations, their anxieties, their cares, their poverty, their riches, their ambition,

rank, greatness, splendour, all are buried with them, their very memory gone and vanished, like a dream of the night, or the dew of the morning. The lord of ten thousand acres rests in six feet of ground at last, and the nameless peasant requires as large a space.

To the proud, to the worldly, to the men who would make this earth their abiding-place for ever, and spend all their time in it in adding house to house, and field to field, in multiplying their gold and silver, and increasing their possessions; these will be sad and sorrowful, humbling and mortifying thoughts. But to the good and faithful and grace-guided Christian, they cannot fail to impart comfort and consolation. When he stands in that hallowed retreat in which so many generations are interred, if, on the one hand, he receives lessons proclaiming the vanity of human life and its pursuits, and the folly of trusting in the passing shadows of time; on the other, he obtains instructions which speak to him of heaven and eternity. To meet the sorrows of grief, he is inspired

with the balm of hope. Patience, resignation, submission, all come into his heart at the bidding of faith, as it whispers to him that the uncertainties of the present will soon be succeeded by the certainties of the future; the unreal promises of time's to-day by the lasting, substantial realities of eternity's to-morrow.

But the lesson of humility is not yet complete. Again let us fix our minds upon the text. It not only compares man to the grass, or the flower of the field, which are gone as soon as the biting or blighting wind has passed over them, but it adds farther, as if to leave no place in his heart for pride and self-exalting thoughts, "and the place thereof shall know it no more." How true is this of man as an inhabitant of this world. What are the fond, proud thoughts, cherished, nourished, fed, and pampered in his heart of hearts by every individual amongst us? It may, I believe, be assumed, that almost every man regards himself as one of the world's necessities; fancies, in his conceit and self-satisfaction, that society could not go on without him,

and is perfectly convinced that his death would leave a blank in it which could never more be filled up. But how opposed to this self-flattering delusion are the voices of fact, truth, and experience. What is their teaching? This man, or that, or the other is one day missed from his usual circle, his usual business, or his usual occupation. Where is he? There is, perhaps, a whisper among those who knew him, that he is ill. He does not appear again amongst us to-morrow. He is worse. The physician has been called in. The sick man's room is darkened, the attendants walk gently. The hand of love smooths his pillow. Skill tries every art for his recovery. Medicine does its utmost. But all in vain. He dies, and is carried to the grave, in which his fathers slept before him. There will be tears shed by his own family; there will be sorrow amongst his immediate friends. But the great, vast, selfish, impassive, busy, bustling world takes no thought thereof, and has no share therein. A soldier in the battle of life has fallen, but another has sprung forward to take his post and occupy

his position, and "his place shall know him no more." A proud monument may attempt a short struggle with oblivion in his behalf, or the humble turf may leave him to instant forgetfulness. But let not the true-hearted, faithful, God-fearing, Christian man be troubled, or dismayed, or overwhelmed by such thoughts as these. If "his place in this world will know him no more" when once he has passed from it, his place in heaven will know him, the holy angels will know him, God Almighty will know him, and keep him in his presence and the fulness of his joy for evermore.

And now, brethren, let us look back from the point of time which we have gained, like travellers from the hill-top upon the plain which they have passed, and see, and consider, what progress has been made in true religion during the years which have fled from our grasp for ever. We of this land, in which the Gospel is preached freely, and with no shade interposed by human hand between us and its pure and glorious light, do truly

and indeed possess great spiritual advantages. But is the treasure set within our reach used or abused? With all our preaching and teaching, with the country divided into parishes, that the Bible and the Church may be brought to every man's door, with all our boasts of the improved and more general system of education, what progress can we report? Is it what it ought to be? Alas! no. The broad tide of sin still sweeps along, bearing its countless victims with it. Vital Christianity is scarce. But formalists abound. Hypocrites abound. Open transgressors abound. And how is it? Can it be accounted for? I have my own opinion, strong and firm, as to one cause of the melancholy lack of true religion amongst us. Whenever I hear of a notorious and profligate offender, or even of a cold professor, I ask myself, What was that man's home education? Had he parents, and what kind of parents were they? What were the examples by which his childhood was formed and moulded? What were the table-talk and the fire-side talk by

which his heart was poisoned and corrupted? Especially, had he a mother, and what kind of a mother was she? These, depend upon it, are the influences which tell with a mighty strength upon a man's character in after life. I, of course, speak generally. The brand may be subsequently snatched from the fire, into which it has been so carelessly cast by parental neglect. Opportunities offered by the mercy of God, and blessed by his grace, may be taken advantage of, and, thanks to the same mercy and the same grace, often are. But the bias imparted by home example and home guidance in a man's early years, for the most part cleaves and clings to him, for better or for worse, through all his days, so that generations are reproduced after generations, each succeeding one marked by the conduct and character of that which went before it. This is the great impediment and difficulty in the way of Christianizing and improving society; and to its removal every good man should bend his anxieties and give his help. Religion should begin

at home. It certainly should not end there. But as certainly it should begin there, and, in the first instance, illuminating the home circle, thence shine forth with all the brilliancy of a good example before the eyes of men, to the glory of God and the honour of his blessed Gospel.

But, before I conclude, let me call upon you, each and all, to commune with your own hearts, and examine and cross-examine your own consciences as to the manner in which the past year was spent by you. When it is recalled, and spread by memory like an open book before you, do you read much in its pages written against you in sin's black letter, or do you find that you were better men and more advanced Christians at its close than you were at its commencement? What did you do in its course for the honour and glory of God, and the establishment of his Gospel and kingdom among men? Have you been his stewards in your charities, his faithful servants in your conduct? What have you done for your own souls or the souls of others? Have you been

reapers, or only gleaners, or, worse still, only idlers in the spiritual harvest? These are all questions which you will one day have to answer before the bar of eternal judgment. You cannot abdicate your responsibility. You cannot, in behalf of your souls, renounce your immortality. You cannot separate the present from the future. You cannot escape the omnipotence of God; you cannot baffle his omniscience. Consequences must be faced. The Divine Word is clear and distinct on that point. What, therefore, must you do? Entering upon a new year, pray that you may resolve, and resolve with prayer to turn over a new leaf, and become other and better men than you have been before. Pray that the bad may become good, and the good better; for there is room for improvement in the very best. Hasten with faith and hope to the one Mediator, the one, one only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. Not only say unto Him, "Lord, Lord," but make Him your Lord in very deed, the Lord of your hearts and lives, his Gospel your teacher, his

heaven your aim, his cross your trust, the Holy Spirit your guide, so that, "old things passing away, and all things becoming new," you may continually grow more and more into the measure and stature of the true disciple, and go on from grace to grace, and, last of all, from grace to glory.

SERMON V.

THE SHIPWRECK OF ST. PAUL.

ACTS xxvii. 31.

“Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.”

ABOUT eighteen hundred years ago a ship of Alexandria was on her voyage to Italy. Navigation was not understood then as it is now. Vessels were not then what they are now. Above all, sailors were not then what sailors are now. The mariner of those days saw in a ripple upon the waters something more terrible and appalling than his successor in our times would recognise in the fiercest storm, with the wind at its highest, and the waves foaming to the clouds in all their tremendous

might and magnificent beauty. The one fled in dismay before a zephyr. The other delights to battle with a hurricane, and feels his spirit rise and his heart beat high within him, as he breasts its fury and rides in triumph over its billows, as, by turns, they swell into mountains and sink into valleys. To such a pitch, indeed, did those old-fashioned sailors carry their fears, that at certain periods of the year they laid up their vessels and abstained from putting to sea altogether. The ship of Alexandria of which I was speaking, was on her voyage to Italy, carrying a cargo of Egyptian wheat to that country. Egypt, under all its different governments and all its changing circumstances, has ever been one of the granaries of the world. It is so now. It was so at the time with which our text is connected. And it was so long before as, without going farther than the Scripture, we learn from the exciting and interesting history of Joseph and his brethren. Indeed, at a much earlier period we read of their great-grandfather, Abraham, taking refuge in Egypt

in a season of famine: In the course of her voyage the Alexandrian ship called at or was driven into the port of Myra, a city of Lycia. Thither also came about the same time a vessel of Adramyttium, which had, as passengers on board of her, a body of Roman soldiers who were guarding certain prisoners on their way to the capital city of the world. These were at once transferred by the centurion or officer in command, to the other vessel which was bound for Italy. With this addition to her passengers she again set sail, but, baffled and driven out of her course by contrary winds, she at last arrived at "a place called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea," in the island of Crete. By this time the period considered unsafe for navigation was at hand. But the master of the ship and the sailors were of opinion that before it set in, they could reach Phenice, another haven of Crete, more convenient and safer for wintering in than Lasea. Before starting, however, for this latter port, they were warned of the danger which they would

surely incur if they made the attempt to reach it, by one of the prisoner-passengers before mentioned. It was the Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, who was being conveyed to Rome in consequence of his appeal to Cæsar, to escape from the plots of the Jews against his life. The warning and advice of St. Paul were wasted upon deaf ears. It was natural that the officer who had the prisoners in charge should, in matters connected with the sea, place more faith in men who were accustomed to it, than in the opinion of one of his captives, whose experience he might doubt, or whose intentions he might suspect. Accordingly, we read, "the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul." But he was presently to be terribly undeceived and emphatically taught who was right and who were wrong. The wind, we are told, "blew softly." The opportunity was inviting. The sailors were confirmed in their opinion. "They supposed that they had obtained their purpose." The anchor was weighed, sail set,

and the vessel once more launched into the deep. But man often proposes what he cannot execute. He often reckons on events which never happen, and calculates upon results which never come. Hardly had they put to sea, when they learned with fear and trembling that the forebodings of the Apostle were about to be fulfilled. The pleasant and tempting wind no longer "blew softly" and deceitfully. There arose a violent storm, and the vessel was swept before it for days and days at the mercy of the waves. The sailors seem very soon to have fallen from the fulness of confidence to the depths of despair. The last trace of hope had vanished from their hearts, and they gave themselves up for lost. In this crisis and agony of their fate the voice of St. Paul was again heard, and it was now listened to with more reverence and attention than it had been before. The master-spirit is ever uppermost in the hour of trial and pinch of danger. We read, "After long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from

Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island." The storm, however, still continued, and the selfish mariners having, as they thought, gained a favourable opportunity, determined to try to make their escape in the boat, and abandon the vessel and her passengers to their fate. But as they were making their preparations for this base desertion of their duty, "Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off." The end was now approaching. We have a farther description of the hurricane, a glowing and thrilling pic-

ture of the final wreck of the vessel, and the seal put to the truth of St. Paul's prediction by the escape to land of all who were on board.

But now let us go back to the text, separate it from the history to which it belongs, and accept it for our considerations as with a spiritual meaning attached to it. "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." I would speak of the Gospel of Christ as the ark of our salvation, the ship of the soul, and I would say to you, "Except ye abide in it, ye cannot be saved." You will, perhaps, admit this as an old and long established truth. But with too many it is only a head truth, not a heart truth, and, therefore, a truth slighted, a truth neglected, or a truth despised. Let us enumerate some instances in which professing Christians are, like the Alexandrian sailors, ready and anxious to leave the ship and take to the boat or a raft or a plank, on which to float off and be overwhelmed by the deep waters of error.

In the first place, there are very many professing Christians who, with "Christ

crucified” and salvation through Him constantly set before them in the Scripture and taught by the Church, cannot yet persuade themselves to accept his blessed sacrifice in their behalf, and throw themselves fully and unreservedly upon his merits. There is a lingering pride in their hearts which withstands the reception of this holy doctrine. They look lovingly at their own works. They exalt their nothingness into a certain value and worth in the vanity of their imagination, and, although they may receive, or rather not deny, the general notion of a Saviour, they yet trust for salvation to their own exertions and good deeds, thus setting the fruits of faith above faith itself, and making the blood of Christ “of none effect.” This spiritual pride, this leaning upon self and dethroning the Saviour, has a wider dominion and a more deeply-rooted sway among men, than you probably think of. It lurks in the hearts of many with whom we should least suspect its presence. It is most difficult to be got rid of and driven away. It seems almost impossible to exhaust it. It has a strange tenacity of life, a won-

derful power of revival, in the soul of man. All mines of gold, silver, iron, lead, coal, or whatever else, may be worn out by time and use. But the great, huge mine of pride in the human heart would appear to be inexhaustible. It is especially and everlastingly busy in raising up stumbling-blocks against the full and unconditional acceptance of the doctrine which we are considering. "What! nothing, not a part owing to myself, but every thing to Christ! Nothing to my works, nothing to my charities, nothing to my honesty, nothing to my morality, but all to the cross!" Yes; just so—all and every thing to Christ and his cross, and nothing to yourselves. Listen. Christ speaks, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." And of this very doctrine of salvation through Him only, we read in another Scripture, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And again, "This

is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." And in another place, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus." So that there is no room left for human merit, and, consequently, every door is shut against human pride. The Church, as a faithful interpreter of the Scriptures, charges her ministers to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified to their flocks, and to proclaim to them the fountain opened by Him and in Him for the washing away of sin and all unrighteousness. Do not reject her teachings. Do not turn from the only Saviour declared unto you. But rather cleave to Him, love Him, and rest all your hopes of salvation in his work of mercy on Mount Calvary. Unless you do abide and rest in this faith, you are like the sailors who would have deserted the ship. "Ye cannot be saved."

There are others, again, who may every

where be found in large numbers, and who dream a wild dream, pleasant enough, it may be, while it lasts, but to have a terrible awakening in the end, that all religion consists in forms and ceremonies, and attention to outward rites and ordinances. They are rich in professions, but poor in performances. They make long prayers, but short practice. They keep the Sabbath, but nothing else. All through the week, they are of the world, most worldly. These also are abandoning the ship of the Gospel for boats, rafts, and planks of their own invention, and about to perish in the wide sea of formalism into which they are launching without chart, rudder, or compass. Ordinances, forms, and all the outward ceremonies of religion are only the means, not the end. They are the handmaids and auxiliaries of religion, not religion itself. God's Bible is loud and clear upon this point, and leaves the hypocrite without plea or excuse. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than

sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." This was Samuel's rebuke to Saul when he found him disobeying the command of God, and talking of offering to Him sacrifices at the same time. And Isaiah thus speaks to the wicked Jews, who, given to all iniquity, yet were, at the same time, most strict in their attention to formal worship: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I

will not hear: your hands are full of blood." And, again, we have our Lord Himself saying in one place, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven;" while in another, He thus emphatically rebukes those most precise of formalists, the Pharisees, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." So that, you see, it is most perilous for your souls to leave the ark of the Gospel for the frail boat of empty formalism, to which, if you trust yourselves, it will only be to float for a season, and then to perish miserably when the breeze of death strikes it, and it sinks beneath you.

But there are more boats yet in which rash and foolish men push off from the ship in which alone safety may be found:

Some fancy that a partial obedience will satisfy the demands of Christ and religion upon them. But the Scripture says otherwise. Its plain words are, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Others are for having all enjoyment of sin for the present, and repenting at some future time. But recollect that there is such a thing as death, and hasten back into the ship which you have deserted, lest it should overtake you suddenly and unexpectedly. Christ Himself gave us this warning: "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

Finally, brethren, if you will not cleave to the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ, ask yourselves in the words of the Apostle, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" There is no other Gospel to be preached to us. This is the Gospel spoken of by the prophets. This is the

Gospel foretold by types and sacrifices. This is the Gospel which Christ came to fulfil. This is the Gospel which the Apostles preached far and wide, and with regard to which, St. Paul made this awful declaration: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Instead of flying from the stout ship of your salvation to the weak boats of your own conceit, instead of "forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing you out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water," you ought to be, you have every cause to be, most thankful that you live in the full blaze of Gospel light, and have free access to the enjoyment of all Gospel privileges. In these days of startling enterprise and wondrous travel, your lot might have been cast where no such spiritual advantages would have been within your reach. You might have been

thrown into heathen lands, in which the voice of glad tidings is never heard, in which no bell marks the Sabbath, in which no prayer is ever raised, no psalm ever sung in the Lord's house on the Lord's day, and where religion seems to be buried in the darkness of the night and the silence of the grave. Or, your portion might have been in some country where the course of free thought is hedged in on every side, by bigotry ready to suspect its existence, and persecution prepared to strike it down. You should, indeed, be thankful that you are where you are, with all the treasures of the Gospel in your hands. Yes! the Gospel is yours, and oh, in very truth, you ought to give yourselves up to be the Gospel's, in return. Hold fast by it; cling to it; believe in it; act by it; love it; live by it. Do you say that you cannot, that you are weak, sinful, erring men, quite unable to obey the command which I set before you? I know all this. As well might we try to build a bridge of ice under a hot, burning sun; as well might we expect the infant taken from its

cradle, to bridle the wild horses in their mad career; as hope that unassisted man could resist and triumph over the spiritual enemies by whom he is surrounded and assailed. But I know also that if you are weak, God is strong. To the strong One, then, go for strength. To Him who alone can help us, approach in all humility, and pray to Him in all seriousness and sincerity, to carry you triumphantly by his grace through the stormy sea of trial to which the Christian probationer is exposed. Pray that you may be kept firm in the faith. Pray that you may cleave to "the truth, as it is in Jesus." Pray that you may abide in the ship and ark of the Gospel. Those who desert that ship, those who abandon that ark, do so at their own risk and peril. But to their own Master they must stand or fall. They will have to face Him on the day of judgment.

S E R M O N VI.

THE SHIPWRECK OF ST. PAUL.

ACTS xxvii. 13, 14.

“ And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.”

It occurred to me, as I was delivering to you a late discourse on a portion of this interesting chapter, that, spiritually speaking, it contains what we may call a rich gold-field of instruction to which we may return again and again, and still, with the blessing of God, extract from it more and more of the precious metal.

As I pointed out to you when the sub-

ject was before under our consideration, the centurion under whose charge St. Paul was being conveyed to Rome, in consequence of his "appeal unto Cæsar," had to decide between two opinions as to the safety or otherwise of pursuing their voyage at that late season of the year. The Apostle warned him of danger and damage if they persevered. The master of the ship, on the other hand, thought that they might keep the sea a little longer, and reach a port more convenient to winter in. The Roman officer listened to the experience of the latter on a question connected with his own profession. He was almost certain so to decide. St. Paul was only a prisoner, and nothing more, in his heathen estimation. Accordingly, the opinion adopted was soon acted upon. "When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon."

In the words of the text we have, al-

most without any help from the imagination, a picture of the voyage of life as constantly attempted and experienced by so many professing Christians. On the one hand, we have St. Paul and all the Apostles and the whole Bible, pointing out to us the only way of salvation. On the other there is Satan striving to beguile us, as he did our first parents, and assuring us of safety and security if we will take him for our pilot, and, under his counsel, steer our course across the ocean of time. Mark his influence. It is great, and many are they in number who, listening to it, abandon the only sure anchorage of the soul, and expose themselves to the danger of eternal death, by deserting the secure haven provided by Christ for them.

In the first place, there is the love of money and worldly possessions. In trying to carry away men into this captivity, the spirit of evil proceeds cautiously and cunningly. "The south wind only blows softly." The sin is masked. Its features of ugliness are concealed. It is a natural feeling for men to wish to improve their

position in the world, and it is a pleasing sight to behold men doing so, when they do not forget Christ and their own souls while so engaged, and when they take honesty for their guide, and charity for their almoner and companion. But it is in another fashion that Satan labours to work upon the hearts of men by the power of gold. He seeks to drive them on from the use to the abuse of it. He would win them to be its worshippers—to devote themselves to its increase and acquisition—to foster the passion of covetousness and the love of self. And then he fills them with pride. They become arrogant and inflated, and fancy that they are utterly independent of God, and can go through the world as well without Him as with Him. Poor, wretched, duped, miserable creatures! Even in this calculation, which takes nothing beyond the grave into the account, they are awfully deceived. “The wind,” we said, “blew softly” at first, and they staked all the happiness of the voyage of life upon its continuance. But what so fickle, what so capricious, as the wind?

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They had embarked and put to sea in reliance upon its gentle promise, but, when once they had left their safe anchorage and were at its mercy, it dealt most treacherously with them. "There arose a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon," and they could not resist it. And so it ever happens to the man who gives himself over to be the slave of Mammon. In the beginning "it blows softly" with him, and he feels delighted as he rises above the pressure of hard necessity. But, separated from God, the calm will not last. There presently arises some "tempestuous wind," some "Euroclydon," which disturbs his dream of happiness. Let us go to Scripture for our proofs that such has been the case in other days as well as these. We open the Bible at the fifth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, and what do we read? Good, true-hearted Elisha, anxious only for the honour and glory of God, whose prophet he was, had just refused the gifts of the Syrian captain, Naaman, cured by him of his leprosy. But his servant, Gehazi, overcome by the

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evil spirit of covetousness, had treacherously obtained a large amount of wealth from the grateful and unsuspecting stranger, and was, doubtless, rejoicing in the success of his deceit. Yea, doubtless, "the wind blew softly" with him, as he exulted in the anticipation of future days to be spent in ease and rest and happiness. But, lo, a change! And how suddenly it presents itself! The "tempestuous wind," the terrible "Euroclydon," overtakes him instantly. He meets his master, is found out in his sin, and the sentence is at once pronounced, "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever." Let us turn to another case. We find it in the fourth chapter of the book of the prophet Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar is walking "in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon." "The wind blows softly." His heart is lifted up within him. He speaks. Listen. "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty." This is thorough, utter, open, undisguised pride.

We do not discover a word of gratitude to God the giver; but Nebuchadnezzar is all and every thing to himself. "The tempestuous wind," however, burst upon him without delay. We read, "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." It was the same with the Herod of whom we read in the twelfth chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The pride of prosperity was in his heart. "The wind blew softly"

with him. "Upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." But what comes next? "The tempestuous wind" was at hand! "Immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." But let us suppose that the sinner who forgets God and worships only his worldly treasures, is overtaken by no adverse storms and tempests, still how long will life itself endure? Death will ride in upon the "tempestuous wind" presently. We shall stand before the "judgment-seat of Christ"—and then!

Again, there is the love of pleasure with its countless victims. The Bible calls upon you to follow Christ and his Gospel. The tempter sets before you the enjoyments, allurements, seductions, and attractions of the world. How many yield and fall into his traps and snares, I need not say. The path of life is strewn with the wreck and

ruin caused thereby, just as in the desert the traveller may find his way by the bones and skeletons of preceding pilgrims and their cattle. But this is not seen at first. For a time, when men have left Christ, and turned from the guidance of the Holy Spirit to revel in the vanities and dissipations of the world, "it blows softly," and, like the sailors in the Alexandrian ship, they fancy that they have obtained just what they wanted. They think that they have discovered the secret of happiness. But what happiness? True happiness? Abiding happiness? Eternal happiness? No such thing. All their dream of it speedily vanishes, like the dust or chaff, before "the tempestuous wind" which is about to arise. It is of the very nature of pleasure without religion that it cloy and wearies its possessors. They forthwith become sated with it when once they have it in their grasp. Besides, it carries its sting, its pains and penalties with it, which cannot be avoided. Men speedily discover that they cannot both sacrifice their strength and intellect upon

the altars of intoxication, and yet retain them for their own use, guidance, and enjoyment. They as quickly learn that they cannot both waste their health upon the shrine of dissipation, and yet keep it as the greatest of earthly blessings. Sin and retribution are seldom far apart. They are generally fellow-travellers, and the slave of the one soon becomes the victim of the other. But in this case also death speedily arrives to close the scene; and, verily, upon the wicked it comes as "the tempestuous wind," which is to sweep them to the fearful judgment which awaits them.

And, farther, there are others who, not to be classed with those who are possessed by an evil spirit of covetousness, or elated and exalted by the pride of wealth, nor yet with the votaries of dissipation and lawless pleasures, are still offending in another fashion, in which probably they will be astonished when told that there is any offence at all. I speak of persons who, not yielding to any desperate sin, on the one hand, but on the other withal, not

blessed with a single spark of vital religion in their hearts, calmly and quietly living in the bosom of their families, cultivate the domestic virtues, and, while "the wind blows softly" with them, go on from day to day happy and contented, loving and being loved, and little troubled by the cares and anxieties of the world beyond. But will this state of things last? Will the picture keep its colours? That depends upon circumstances. Let us state a case in which it will not. It often, too often, happens that persons, whose affections, and wishes, and hopes are thus centred upon their families, have no space in their hearts for any other altars. They may be all that has been represented, and yet theirs may be prayerless, graceless, godless houses. They may be living without Christ in the world. They may be strangers to the influence of the Holy Spirit. All their thoughts may be of the earth, most earthy. Their devotion to their families, may, so to speak, be too devoted. It may exclude every other devotion. It may make them idols. It may shut out God. It may

elevate these perishable gifts of dust and ashes above the heavenly Giver, by whose permission they have been sent into the world and abide in it. Here we are brought to the explanation of one of God's secrets, frequently most mysterious to poor, feeble man. How often do his thunders roll and the "tempestuous wind arise," by which the transient happiness of such families as those which have been described is suddenly wrecked and broken up. The storm is let loose. The bolt falls. The domestic hearth is made joyless and desolate. And why? God's hand is in the work, and, if properly and seriously looked at, it is a work of mercy. The present aspect of it is terrible to bear, as we contemplate hopes disappointed, hearts blighted and withered, and all the woes unutterable of crushed affection. But what is the true bearing of the case? The child taken away is rescued from the mistaken fondness which would have trained it for this world and destruction. The parents are rebuked and reproved, and, if the visitation be properly received, an

entrance for the divine grace into the heart may be made, and the Gospel be heard, and Christ be triumphant, and souls be saved by "the tempestuous wind," which the breeze that "blew softly" would have tempted to their ruin.

But now, brethren, to use the words of the Apostle, "shew I unto you a more excellent way." Instead of yielding to the temptations of this world, which at first "blow softly," but overwhelm you with "tempestuous winds" at last, henceforth make the Bible of God your guide, counsellor, and friend. All other friendships will deceive you. But it is a friendship which will wear well, and never wear out. In the midst of the world's greatest happiness there is ever a skeleton intruding into the feast, there is ever a cloud darkening the sky, there is ever "a moth fretting the garment." And oh, what heavy hands the world lays upon its slaves! Disappointment has a heavy hand. Care has a heavy hand. Poverty has a heavy hand. Sickness has a heavy hand. Death has a heavy hand. Above all, sin has a

heavy hand. But the Bible reader, who is, under the blessing of God, made a Christian by the study, is raised above the power of all these terrible thorns in the side of the worldling. They are not "tempestuous winds" to him. He walks under the protection of that Mighty One, at whose word, "Peace, be still," there is a sweet and heavenly calm around him. It has been an often-expressed wish that there should be a Bible in every house. That would be something. That would be much. But it would not be enough. The work will not be accomplished until there is a Bible not only in every house, but in every hand, in every head, and in every heart. With whom do we find the greatest, the purest happiness dwelling? With those truly, who read God's Book with prayers to Him to enlighten them to the understanding of it, and to strengthen them to obey it; with those who are brought by its influence to dwell together in love and union, who can discourse together on religious subjects, and find comfort in it, and who are anxious to lead their families to the

knowledge of the Saviour. I wish that such Christian households were more common than they are. And why are they not? The reason is obvious. St. Paul gave this charge to his converts, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." But it is a charge little heeded, indeed generally neglected, if not quite forgotten in these days. Few young persons, either men or women, make religion a necessary part of the fortune which they look for in a partner for life, although it is in itself a fortune far surpassing in value all gold, and silver, and land. It makes people of one mind, and that the right mind, in a house together. There is a charm about "the beauty of holiness" which never fades. It is a flower which blossoms as sweetly in autumn and winter, as in spring and summer. It is the strongest, best security which can be obtained for happiness in marriage life. But few, I repeat, give much thought or consideration to a point on which so much of their future peace on both sides of the grave depends. Nay, too many, I believe, consider irreligion

to be no objection, but talk, and are supported by foolish human proverbs in so talking about their anticipated happiness with a reformed sinner, as if their fleeting influence and attractions could perform the work which God's Holy Spirit can alone accomplish. It is this wretched forgetfulness of "the one thing needful," which makes so many wretched homes and households in the land. Let us hope that, as Christian education spreads, this fruitful source of evil may be diminished. It is at present the parent of much of the misery to be found amongst all classes of society.

But I was speaking of Bible Christians, men who, with prayer for God's blessing upon the work, study his Scripture for the sake of the great truths, the great lessons, and the great examples which it contains. These men are the happy ones of time, as well as of eternity. A text of Scripture is with them a weapon of warfare as powerful as the sling in David's hand, when the Philistine challenged him to the fight. Placed front to front with temptation, they smite it to the ground at once with "the

sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;" that "word of God," of which it is written in another passage, "it is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Enlightened by the holy study, their mental vision is freed and purified, and they are enabled to see all the distance between the value of things temporal and things eternal. They would be Christians, and they strive, and wrestle, and pray to be Christians, while they are in the full possession of their health, and strength, and faculties; they would model their years of activity and intelligence after the precepts and examples of their Lord, and not wait to carry to Him at last, under the influence of fear and terror, the worthless offering of vows and promises wrung from them by decrepitude and disease. And they would bring up their families likewise, not to be the wild Indians of society, not to afflict the Christian, shock the philanthropist, and

baffle and puzzle the legislator himself, but to be, truly and indeed, scholars and disciples of Jesus Christ. And when they walk abroad they still read of God in all his works by which they are surrounded. They see his power, and care, and love, and might, and majesty, and glory, in earth, air, and sky. His stamp is upon all things. Where is He not? To Him creation tracks its origin. The identity of the God of nature with the God of the Bible is established and preserved in the heart of the true believer. There are lessons for him, rich in meaning, in every direction. From the dazzling sun which lights the world to the smallest insect which crawls upon its surface, in all he recognises volumes which testify to the omnipotence of God, and, verily, they speak volumes to him.

Pray then, brethren, I say to you, as I conclude, that, by the grace of God, you may be brought to be of the number of these true disciples, ever sheltered from the "tempestuous winds" of sin and wickedness, and ever guided by the breath of the Spirit which "blows softly." Pray

that, while in this world, you may rise superior to all its temptations and trials, and, prophet-like, peer into the future, and see all the joys which await the faithful, so that, when called into the presence of the Lord, you may not be alarmed by the approach of nature's last struggle, but calm because confident, and confident because hopeful, and hopeful because your belief is strong and sure and steadfast, that Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and that "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him."

SERMON VII.

THE SHIPWRECK OF ST. PAUL.

ACTS xxvii. 18.

“They lightened the ship.”

SELF-PRESERVATION, it is often said, is the first law of nature. Keep that observation in your thoughts. I shall return to it before I have gone very far into this discourse. When dear, precious life is at stake, what would not man give to keep and prolong it? No price would be too great, no sacrifice too tremendous, nothing too much to pay for another year, month, or even day of existence. We need not labour to multiply examples of this readiness and willingness to barter

earthly treasures for what we may call a renewed lease of this transitory life, in the shape of an escape from present danger, with all the uncertainty of the future to be still met and encountered. The case under our immediate consideration will suffice for our purpose. When the ship in which St. Paul was being carried, as a prisoner to Italy, was overtaken by the storm in which it was wrecked, the sailors did all they could to weather it until they could again escape into some port with safety. After taxing their small skill and exerting the miserable seamanship of the day to the uttermost, as a last resource, in the very extremity of danger, "they lightened the ship," that is, they threw overboard, they cast into the yawning billows, the very cargo for the sake of which they had undertaken the voyage, in order to make their vessel more buoyant and equal to the conflict with the angry waves. The circumstances, they thought, left them no choice but this—should they perish with their treasures, or try to save their lives at the cost of their

abandonment. Which? Their resolution was soon taken. The dead want not earthly treasures. Life is sweet. "They lightened the ship."

Now, the condition of man from the cradle to the grave, as a probationer for eternity, may be likened to a voyage—heaven the port of safety and security at which he would wish to arrive at last. But the fierce storms of temptation rage about him on every side, striving to drive him from his course and overwhelm him beneath the great, terrible waves of sin. What must he do? Let us go back to the proverbial saying of which I spoke just now, namely, that self-preservation is the first law of nature, and then apply it to the things of the soul as well as to those of the body. What, then, did the sailors of the vessel in which St. Paul was a passenger do under the influence of this strong rule of selfishness? "They lightened the ship," threw the precious cargo overboard to save more precious life. We have here both a lesson and an example to be spiritually studied and spiritually

followed. By whatever sins men are separated from Christ, as, in the voyage of life, they float down the stream of time towards the ocean of eternity, they must abandon them and give them up, lest by clinging to them, they make shipwreck both of soul and body. The drunkards must leave their drunkenness. They must "lighten the ship." The dishonest must renounce their dishonesty. They must "lighten the ship." The swearers must give up their swearing. They must "lighten the ship." The proud must cease from their pride. They must "lighten the ship." The covetous must abandon their covetousness. They must "lighten the ship." The lovers of pleasure, the gay, the frivolous, the triflers, the worldlings—all must do the same thing, and "lighten the ship." They must toss to the winds and waves the whole cargo of vanities and sins and evil thoughts and evil deeds which they have been attempting to carry with them, if they are anxious to escape the wreck and ruin of their souls. While men are doing, and delighting and rejoicing in

doing, the works of Satan, they cannot expect to be recognised as the disciples of Christ. "They cannot serve two masters." "But," pleads the man of this world, only proving more and more by every word which he utters, that he is farther and farther removed from the right spirit of the true believers, "all my sins! All! Must I give up every thing in which I take pleasure? Is there no door open for a compromise? If I do all I can, will not that be sufficient? If I become generally obedient instead of generally disobedient, if I no longer shock the world by open and flagrant iniquity, may I not retain some favourite sin, if only I cloak it over with a show of outward decency, propriety, and respectability?" This is your question. What is the answer of God as given in God's Holy Bible? The very sin which you would especially keep, is the very sin which you are especially commanded to renounce. Your pleading is for a favourite sin. That is the very sin which St. Paul warns us against, when, after telling us generally "to lay aside

every weight," he adds emphatically, "and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Favourite sins are especially the sins which press down the soul in the deep waters of temptation, and will inevitably sink the ship beneath their raging billows unless it is lightened of them. And let us hear our Lord Himself on this subject of favourite sins. Although, when speaking of it, He used the figurative language of the East, still there is something so awful, so positively appalling and terribly true and truly terrible in his words, that the most hardened nature cannot listen to them without fear and trembling. He says, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And

if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." This is, indeed, highly figurative language, but there is nothing at all figurative about the meaning of the lesson which it is intended to convey. That is plain enough. In it our Lord teaches us that as we would give a limb for a life, as we would sacrifice a hand, a foot, or an eye, that these frail and perishable bodies of ours might abide some short time longer in the world that now is, so must we be prepared to forsake the sins which endanger our immortal souls, although to part with them would be as painful to us as the tearing asunder the members of our mortal frames. However near, therefore, your iniquities may be to your hearts, however dearly you may love them, you must cast them from you. The question with the sailors of whom the text speaks, and which many a sailor before and since has had to answer, was, Sink or swim? Which? "They

lightened the ship." The same question is before you. Which? "Go, and do ye likewise."

And let us, moreover, measure by another standard the distance to which you have wandered from a true discipleship to Jesus Christ. When by baptism you were admitted into his Church and all its privileges, "your godfathers and godmothers promised and vowed three things in your name. First, that you should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. Secondly, that you should believe all the articles of the Christian faith. And thirdly, that you should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life." Your godfathers and godmothers, observe, made this promise and this vow for you at the time of your baptism. Now, unless you have adopted them as your own spiritually and practically, your faith true and genuine, your lives pure and Christian, all outward professions of religion, all external observance of rites and ceremonies and

forms and ordinances, cold and barren attendance at church, body-bending and lip-service, are worth just nothing. We have here only the shell of religion without the kernel, savourless salt, no vital spark in the soul, the heart untouched, the world's, Satan's—certainly not Christ's. But I must carry you through a little more self-examination on the subject of the baptismal vows and promises made for you, to ascertain, if possible, exactly how far you are believing and acting as if you considered yourselves bound by them. Let us begin.

1. Have you, as your godfathers and godmothers then promised for you, “renounced the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh?” This includes drunkenness, dissipation, swearing, dishonesty, over-reaching, sabbath-breaking, hate, envy, falsehood, malice, covetousness, disobedience to parents, neglect of children, backbiting, slander, and sin in every other form and shape which it can put on.

2. Do you “believe all the articles of the Christian faith?” Have you a strong and lively faith “in God the Father, who hath made you and all the world, in God the Son, who hath redeemed you and all mankind, and in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth you, and all the elect people of God?” In the Bible in its fulness and integrity? In its promises and threats? In its history of the creation and its revelations about the future? In its being the inspired word of God whence, and whence alone, we draw all our knowledge of our Heavenly Father, and his ways and his purposes, and his plans for our happiness and salvation?

3. And upon this Christian faith are you striving, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to build a fabric of Christian righteousness, “to keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life?”

But to these questions some persons, anxious to evade all responsibility, will probably say, they are only from the Church Catechism, and then flatter themselves that

they have escaped from a very unpleasant subject by the help of a very unmeaning quibble. Well, they are, you say, only from the Church Catechism, But I have yet to learn that the Church, either in her catechism or in any other part of her services, asks her followers to believe or to do any thing which the Scripture does not also command them to believe and to do. But still, as you "have appealed unto Cæsar, unto Cæsar you must go." Take, therefore, the Scriptures into your hands, and "search them" diligently, to find what they teach which the Church does not require, what they command which the Church does not enforce, and wherein she departs from them in proclaiming "the truth as it is in Jesus," and insisting upon Christian holiness as the sure mark and sign of his faithful disciples? The Church does not fear, she courts, such a comparison. She knows that to be a true interpreter and reflex of the Scripture is every thing, but that to depart from such a character is to become nothing. Whence are her prayers? From the Scripture.

Whence her praises and thanksgivings? From the Scripture. Whence her doctrines? From the Scripture. Yea, we find the Scripture breathing and speaking in, guiding and inspiring all her services. It was the object of the good and holy men who compiled them to accomplish this consummation, and I do not think, and I hope that you will agree with me, that human wisdom could possibly have approached more nearly to the aim and mark which they had in view.

But, to return to the text, "They lightened the ship." After pondering over all the injunctions and denunciations against sin which I have set before you, it may be that some of you, alarmed, but still worldly; disturbed, but not convinced, will say, "And, if we do forsake all our evil courses, what then? What compensation do you offer us for the joys and pleasures which you call upon us to give up?" Much in every way. For the perishable treasures of this world we offer you the true riches of eternity, for the fleeting transitory enjoyments of time the ever-

lasting and unfading happiness of heaven. The ministers of the Gospel have great and solemn things to declare to their flocks, whereby, with the help and blessing of God, they hope to win them from the error of their ways, and bring them to Christ. They have to tell them that souls are very precious in his eyes, and that his love and mercy are boundless, never sleeping, always working, in his own way and for his own glory, for the salvation of poor sinners for whom his Son, the Lord Jesus, was content to die. They have to declare to them how they became sinners. This takes us to the beginning, that is, our beginning, when our first parents were created by God in his own image to serve and love Him. We have to tell them of man's fall, our own sinful nature derived and inherited therefrom, and of all which heavenly mercy has done for their recovery and salvation, and how, in the face of all these things, men sin and sin on. We have to explain to them how troubles and sorrows and sicknesses are sent to disturb our attachment to this world, and

make us look to our Saviour before it is too late. We have to speak to them of the promise of the Holy Spirit ever ready with his preventing and assisting grace to bring us to, and keep us in, the heavenly path. We have to set before them "Christ crucified," Christ ascended into heaven, Christ the mediator, ever pleading his sufferings and death in our behalf, and praying the Father to pardon and blot out the sins of those who truly repent, firmly believe, and strive, with the divine grace, to lead a new life of purity and holiness. We have to proclaim the importance of humility, the efficacy of prayer, and the blessed fruits of Scripture reading. And, as the crown of all Gospel preaching, we have to declare to them that Christian men, undeserving and unworthy as the best of them still are, will, at last, for Christ's sake, be admitted to the joys of heaven. Here, then, is the answer which we have to give to those who ask, what compensation we offer to those who forsake this world and its vanities for the next and its treasures? *The joys of*

heaven! Of the nature of these joys in all their fulness, glory, and magnificence, it is not God's pleasure to speak to us clearly in his Bible. But He has revealed to us sufficient of their nature to attract, rivet, and satisfy the faith of the true Christian. He has, without laying before us any exact description of it, allowed, here and there, in his Scripture, certain rays of light to stream out, as it were, from the mansions of the blessed, from which we gain the fact that, whatever may be its kind and character, the happiness which awaits the faithful, will be of the purest and most exalted nature.

But the true Christian has not to wait for the next world to test and prove the value of religion. He feels its blessings here. He is the only happy man in the present time. His faith is strong and sure, and that fills him with a conviction that whatever happens to him is all for the best. He seeks with prayer to lead a holy life, and that brings him the blessing of a good conscience. His hopes for the future are accompanied by sweet comforts and

consolations for the present. When the fierce winds of trial and disappointment overtake such men, they do not murmur. They feel that they must be wanted, and they consider how they may yet "lighten the ship" of any worldly feelings and attachments which may be endangering its safety. And, by the power of the same faith, they know that if they receive God's visitations in a proper manner, they will gain in Him a Friend never wearied by their prayers, never absent from their side, watching over them evermore, and loving them more and more as He is more and more loved by them. And, in this conviction mighty within them, they live and love on, hopeful and happy, assured that, although friend after friend may be taken from them, although joy after joy and treasure after treasure may depart, still they are gaining more than they are losing. God is with them, and heaven is coming.

Brethren, pray, and strive, and work, that you may be added to the number of such men, and come out of the ranks of those foolish ones of the world, whose only

anxiety is to be like so many motes dancing through a sunbeam into oblivion. Pray that you may turn to God with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your soul, and all your strength. Lean on Him; learn from Him; love Him; obey Him. Let "No more life without religion," be your motto. Set your face towards the future. From the lofty watch-tower of faith peer into eternity. Be resolute to breast the current of iniquity. Never be weary of doing the work of a true disciple. Be vigilant. Pray. Toil. Consider how much is at stake, and, whatever sins and pleasures have possession of your affections, you must supplicate for strength to cast them from you. YOU MUST "LIGHTEN THE SHIP."

SERMON VIII.

THE SHIPWRECK OF ST. PAUL.

ACTS xxvii. 25, 26.

“Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.”

BEFORE we give our consideration to the text, we must go back to the verses which immediately precede it, and which, in truth, are closely connected with it. When the last hope of safety by their own exertions had passed away from the crew of the vessel in which St. Paul was sailing, and they had abandoned themselves to despair, a sudden ray of light was shed upon them and a promise of escape set

before them. We read, "After long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." What a beautiful, sublime, and comforting lesson is here imparted to us! But it is in accordance with the teaching of other portions of Scripture from which we obtain a knowledge of the influence exerted by good and holy men upon the affairs of this world. The apostle, St. James, tells us that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." God would have spared the cities of the plain at the intercession of Abraham, if ten righteous men could have been found among their inhabitants. In the fifth chapter of the book of the

prophet Jeremiah, it is written, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it." And, in that interesting part of St. Paul's history which is before us to-day, we hear him distinctly affirming of "the two hundred and seventy-six souls" in the ship with him, that the angel of the Lord had thus spoken, "Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." What a consoling, elevating, ennobling doctrine for good, Christian men, however lowly and humble, have we in these Scriptural assurances. Human history never mentions them. In its pages, statesmen have all the praise, and heroes all the glory. The march of armies is chronicled. The fields stained with blood are remembered. There is a crown for one conqueror, a title for another, a monument for a third. But God, in whose hands the issues of battle, as well as of all things else are, is moved to bring about

results by and for the sake of the very men whom the world never takes into its account and calculations at all. There may be holy and good men, dwelling in their little cottages in some small village not even marked upon the map; toiling, labouring, lowly men, with names unknown, unheard of beyond their native place, and little thought of in it; and yet these may be the very men, pious, Christian men, whose prayers, going up to God from unfeigned lips and faithful hearts, are an acceptable sacrifice before Him, and, like Jacob wrestling with Him for a blessing, prevail with Him to spare and make prosperous the land of their birth and love. Of these nameless guardians of a country, man in his pride and blindness thinks not. He recognises them not. He feels no gratitude to them, and would, probably, in many instances, laugh to scorn the very notion of owing any thing to them, just as, in all likelihood, the proud and imperial Cæsar would have ridiculed the very idea that he owed the lives of his soldiers to the presence and prayers of the holy Paul.

But if men know them not, God knows them. Not a name of them all, though unnoticed in human histories, shall be missing from the book of life when many a lowly one in this world shall be exalted, and many a poor, despised one here be translated to be a saint in heaven. And, farther, properly considered and seriously pondered over, this doctrine increases and strengthens, in an unutterable degree, the motives which call upon a man to be a true disciple of his Lord. In addition to himself, the care, the prosperity, the safety of others, his family, his friends, his neighbours, his country are thrown upon him. His influence may extend through all to all. The smallest wheel as well as the largest must be kept in order in the grandest achievements of mechanism, or the whole will go wrong. Every man, therefore, should strive to live for all, as well as for himself, since the good of all is so bound up together by the providence of God.

We now come to the text. St. Paul having laid before his fellow-passengers the

promise of their and his escape made to him by the angel of God, thus continued, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island." In the first of these verses we read, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." This is faith—"for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me,"—faith in all its beauty, perfection, purity, and integrity. The storm was at its highest; the ship was driving before it; darkness was around; neither sun nor stars could be seen for many days; hope had departed; the sailors were in despair; in human calculation all was over except the last struggle for life, and the last dying shriek of the drowning. And yet at such a time, under such circumstances, and in the midst of such a scene it was, that the Apostle stood forth boldly, confidently, and, more than hopefully, certainly, to speak of coming safety. He had no reasons, such as would have satisfied his hearers, to give for this as-

urance. Examined and cross-examined by them ever so closely, he could have pointed to no lessening of the storm, no calming down of the waves, "no signs in the sky" foretelling a change of the weather, and with it an end of their danger. But he had what was to him a better, a stronger reason to assign. The angel of God had stood by him, and told him that they should escape, and, therefore, he adds with a simple emphasis, which no eloquence of language could equal, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Now, brethren, this faith of St. Paul must be the faith of every Christian man. We have the Scriptures of God in our hands. They are to us what his angel was to the Apostle. If the messenger of the Most High promised him an escape from the tempest to which he was exposed, they hold out to us an assurance, through the merits of the Redeemer, of an escape from the storms of trial and temptation by which we are assailed in the world which now is. Anchored on the Scriptures, our faith is firm and sure and strong. To every question

touching the things of the soul it has the same answer. Are we asked, Why we believe that there is a future state in which retribution will overtake the sinners, and the faithful will be with their Lord for ever, it opens the page of Scripture in which such things are revealed, and then says triumphantly, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it is told me?" Are we asked, Why we believe that, in answer to our prayers, the Spirit of grace will descend into our hearts, and cleanse, and purify, and strengthen them within us, it replies, There, read it in the Scriptures, and, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it is told me?" Are we asked again, Why we believe that "the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world," that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of souls, that sinners who come unto Him are reconciled to the Father through the blood of his cross, it once more exclaims with, if I may use such an expression, the same beautiful sameness, I find it all written in the Scripture, and, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it is told me?" Oh, the magnificence and

simplicity, the height and depth, and breadth and happiness of such a faith as this! God has spoken, and it does not contradict Him; it does not doubt Him; it does not even presume to argue and reason with Him. It recognises his voice, and that is enough; that is all and every thing for it. It throws itself unresistingly, trustingly, relyingly, hopefully, boldly, confidently on his truth. His Word must stand fast for ever. Faith is convinced of that, or it would not be faith, and, therefore, it writes upon its banner, and takes for its motto the glorious words of the Apostle, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it is told me." Shake me not with doubts; trouble me not with fears; talk not to me of dangers: they are all spoken to deaf ears; "I believe God;" I know what is before me; I care not what man may say, or think, or do; I am clad in an armour which is proof against all that;—"I believe God."

But now let us proceed to the second verse of the text. St. Paul having declared to his fellow-passengers the promise of

safety which he had received from the angel of God, and his belief that it would be fulfilled, goes on to say, "Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island." Their lives were to be spared, but their ship was to be lost. This is a picture of what often happens to the best of Christians in the voyage through time to eternity. The faithful disciple has his trials and misfortunes as well as other men. They may be necessary to test, and prove, and purify his faith, and separate it from the grosser things of time and passion. A season of probation is not intended to be an undisturbed slumber on a bed of roses. But the trials of faith are its triumphs to the true Christian who is fervent in prayer, and strong in the help which prayer will obtain for him. Temptations may come upon him. But what of that? Calamities may overtake him. But what of that? Misfortunes may assail him. But what of that? His portion may be one of unceasing toil and labour. But what of that? Poverty may be his lot. But what of that? Sickness may be his companion,

and sorrow may make acquaintance with him. But what of that? What of all these things? Others have so suffered, and escaped unhurt from the fiery furnace before now. He looks at the Prophets. Were they men of ease and comfort, and worldly luxury and enjoyment? He looks at the Apostles. Were they men of purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day, and leading a life of grandeur and magnificence? Above all and before all, he looks at the example of his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. And what does he then see in all that Master's course and ministry from Bethlehem to Golgotha? And shall the disciple be above his Master? Oh, no, no, no! It is enough. He is satisfied as he contemplates Him with the eye of faith, if he can be only like Him. Faith strengthened by prayer is warmed, not chilled, as the battle of the soul goes on. The waves of trouble may swell around him, the storms of misfortune may beat upon his head, affliction may be on every side of him, and sickness may add its pinch and sting; but, from the midst of present

darkness, his faith still pierces through the thickest clouds to the bright, burning, blazing star of hope which shines in the sky of heaven beyond. By that he steers his course, trusting, believing, and knowing that, directed by it, he will at last reach "the haven where he would be;" and trusting, and believing, and knowing also that, with God's blessing, the time will come when, that haven gained, he will look back with joy and gratitude upon his stormy passage across the ocean of life, plainly tracing and understanding all which is dark and mysterious to him now, and seeing clearly what he as yet only "sees through a glass, darkly," God's purpose, God's plan, God's wisdom, God's love, in what seemed most strange and was most painful during his earthly pilgrimage.

But we have yet another lesson, and a most important lesson it is, to draw from the example of St. Paul on the occasion which we are considering. He had been assured by the angel of God that he and his fellow-passengers should be saved from the danger which threatened their destruc-

tion, and he had openly declared, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." But what next? Mark and observe it well, for it speaks to us in a clearer voice and more decisive tone than ten thousand sermons. With the assurance of safety revealed to him from heaven, he did not say, "Now let us sit still and idle, and give up all exertions in our own behalf, and leave God's love to work out its own way by a miracle." On the contrary, his voice was raised, insisting upon every one doing his duty to the very uttermost and to the very last, knowing that God's mercy was to bless their efforts, not supersede them. When the sailors would have deserted the ship, he directed the soldiers to cut away the ropes of the boats, adding that their experience and labours were necessary for the safety of the whole party. He commanded the fasting and terrified passengers to take meat to refresh and strengthen them for the final struggle which was approaching. The rest of the cargo was then thrown overboard, and the vessel run on shore at

the nearest point to the land whence, when the wreck took place, escape would be most easily effected. In short, the Apostle acted upon the conviction that, while the result of every thing depended upon God, nothing was to be left undone by man. He asked for no miracle. He was satisfied to rely upon mercy.

And now for the lesson which, I said, we might draw from this example. The Christian is assured that salvation has been wrought for him by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and he likewise "believes God, that it shall be even as it is told him." He knows and feels that without "Christ crucified" there is no salvation, and that, therefore, salvation is to be looked for and hoped for and gained through "Christ crucified" alone. But what then? True, he can put forth no claim to reward for any righteousness of his own. True, he can only hope for heaven through the meritorious sacrifice offered by his Redeemer. But still he knows what is the meaning of a faithful discipleship to his Lord and Master. He recollects the

Apostle's question, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" And he recollects also the Apostle's emphatic answer to his own emphatic question. "God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Faith must have its perfect work. Love must produce its harvest of gratitude. Grace must bear its fruits. The altars of charity must be set up in the temple of the heart, prepared and purified for their reception by the Holy Spirit Himself. But, at the same time, while avoiding one extreme, be most careful not to fall into another. Human pride, ever struggling for power over us, is most anxious to gild poor human works with some degree or show of merit. Under its influence men would substitute faith in themselves for genuine, lively faith in Jesus Christ, and rely upon self-righteousness instead of the pure righteousness which belongs to Him alone. But this is to rob the Gospel of its brightest truth, its most precious gem. We are to be faithful disciples to our Lord, and to Him leave all the rest.

Finally, brethren, pray that you may have such a faith as that which the Apostle described, when he said, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." St. Paul had such a faith, and was saved by it. St. Peter had such a faith, and was saved by it. St. James and St. John and the other Apostles had such a faith, and were saved by it. And many and many a Christian man since, saints, martyrs, and good men in all ranks of life, have had such a faith, and been saved by it. Then why not you? God is willing. Who hinders it? Moreover, you will find it a treasure for time as well as for eternity. Food in a house, it is said, is a good thing. It is. Plenty in a house, it is said, is a good thing. It is. Warmth in a house, it is said, is a good thing. It is. Contentment in a house, it is said, is a good thing. It is. But still, far above and before all things else, religion is the brightest sunbeam which can light up and illuminate a human dwelling. It hallows and sanctifies and blesses and sweetens and refines all the rest. It makes every thing

look cheerful. It makes every body feel happy. A Christian household is the nearest approach to Paradise which can be attained on earth. But do you say that you cannot overcome the difficulties which lie between you and a faith such as that spoken of? Have you ever tried? And how? Have you ever tried, not idly, carelessly, faintly, feebly, uncertainly, but like men in earnest? It is time that you should do so. Begin with prayer to God to bless your efforts. His Bible is in your hands. Grasp it fondly in your heads and in your hearts. Make it your friend, guide, and adviser. Consult it when in doubt. Consult it when in danger. Consult it when in difficulty. On every possible occasion which arises, remember the wise man's words, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Do you wonder how sin came into the world? Go to the Bible. Do you want to know how sin is to be expiated and pardon obtained for sinners?

Go to the Bible. Would you learn what makes a true discipleship to Jesus Christ? Go to the Bible. Would you be told whence strength is to be obtained to enable you to fight the battle of the soul? Go to the Bible. Are you perplexed at seeing poverty and distress and sickness and death invade the good man's house, while the wicked is prosperous and rich? Go to the Bible. In its page, revealed to us by God, all is told, all is explained, all made clear. Believe in it, trust, pray that, having lived here as Christ's faithful disciples, at last, as, when the shipwreck came, Paul and his fellow-passengers escaped to land, so you, when the hour of death arrives, may be received into the mansions of the blessed for the sake of "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

S E R M O N I X .

THE SABBATH.

EXODUS xx. 8.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

IN the second chapter of the book of Genesis we read, “God rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.” When the law of the Sabbath was delivered from Sinai, it was enforced and sanctioned by a revival of the memory of this, its first origin and appointment. We thus read in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, “Remember the

Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

The history of the creation of the world in one of these passages, and the allusion to it in the other, must be first considered. We are told that God, after being employed six days on this great work, rested on the seventh. There are two points to be cleared up here. If God, in the exercise of his attribute of Almighty power, had so chosen, He might have accomplished his work at once and in one moment. He had only to will it, and it would have been done. But He had an end and purpose in view in occupying these six days. We shall presently see that it

was a beautiful arrangement prompted by love and mercy. And then again, when we read that God rested from his work on the seventh day, we are not to put our commonplace and every-day meaning upon the word, *rest*. Man works, and is tired; toils, and is fatigued, worn out, and exhausted, and requires rest to recruit and renew his strength and refresh his weary limbs. But it is not so with God. Although we speak of Him in human language, we are not, even in thought, to clothe Him with human infirmities. To one whose will is his worker, there can be no such thing as toil or labour. To Him fatigue cannot come, and rest cannot be needful. We must, therefore, gather this lesson from the history of the creation, that God employed six days upon it as a type of the six week-days in which man was to perform all his worldly labours, and rested or paused on the seventh as an example to man also to keep it holy and observe it as a Sabbath.

There is great thought and love for man in this appointment of the Sabbath, whe-

ther we consider him as an inhabitant of this world or as an heir of immortality.

In the first place, considered only as an inhabitant of this world, to what a wretched, miserable existence would man be doomed, if the Sabbath did not come in its weekly round to relieve his life of toil and labour. If his doom from the cradle to the grave were work, work, work, everlasting, unceasing work, without pause, break, interruption, breathing-time, or rest, he would be condemned to a slavery which would speedily poison his health, destroy his constitution, and shorten his days. But the appointment of the Sabbath has forbidden all this. The toil of the week-day is made lighter by the hope of the Sabbath, and the wear and tear of the week-day are repaired by the rest of the Sabbath. Both mind and body obtain, by this pause in their occupation and this relaxation of their stretch and tension, a new lease of strength and vigour. Fathers and mothers and children have a day to pass together in love and happiness, a day to themselves, a home day, a day apart

from the noise and bustle, and dirt and dust, and excitement of the six week-days of wearing labour. If man were only a beast of burthen, or a mere human machine, the Sabbath would be a treasure and a blessing to him. It is especially the poor man's security and title-deed, and stronghold and citadel of happiness. God has given it to him, and made it such. As of old, at the words, "Peace, be still! the wind ceased, and there was a great calm," so does the return of each succeeding Sabbath seem to pronounce the same soothing command over the boisterous ocean of the world. The wind of excitement ceases. There is a great calm. Hush! it is God's Sabbath—it is, so made by Him, also man's Sabbath—tread softly on the grave of the week-days past. Yes! ever welcome be the return of the seventh day. It is the green spot in the desert of human existence. It is the crown and jewel and jubilee of the week. It brings with it freedom, liberty, emancipation. Well may the careworn, toil-exhausted man, exclaim at its arrival, "This is the day which the

Lord hath made ; I will rejoice and be glad in it."

But we said farther, that in the appointment of the Sabbath there is great thought and love for man as an heir of immortality. There is. If it is good for the health of his body that he should at regular intervals rest from toil and labour, it is also good for the health of his soul that he should be at times called away from the cares and anxieties, and business and bustle, and pleasures and temptations of the world. As it is, he is too much of the earth, earthy. What would he be without the holy interruption of the Sabbath to call him to God, and remind him of things spiritual, eternal, and heavenly? What would become of the ship drifting towards the rocks, if she had no anchor to let go and arrest her course? What would become of the fire, if no fresh fuel were ever brought to it? Man during his weekly occupations and employments is as a drifting ship with every thing bearing him towards destruction. But the Sabbath comes, and the anchor of hope on which

he then takes hold, checks him in his dangerous career. Man during his weekly occupations and employments is as the fire burning low and in danger of being extinguished through lack of fuel. But the Sabbath comes, and the live coal of religion is again supplied and burns up brightly in him. God's wisdom and mercy are, indeed, herein greatly exalted. Without the Sabbath, man's life would be like the course of the wild horse, unbridled, unreined, darting furiously on without bit or curb to check it in its maddening speed. As year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day, passed away in all the monotony of worldliness, no difference, no distinction, each like the other, and all for time and earth and self, to-day as yesterday and to-morrow as to-day, buying, selling, bargaining, toiling, money seeking, pleasure hunting, with no pause, no stop, no interval, no break, all good and spiritual thoughts in man would speedily be crushed out by the dust and ashes of worldly pursuits or choked by worldly cares. But the love of God has

not left him to be so tempted, nor his soul to be so endangered. After six days spent in labour, there is a sudden cessation from all the toil and turmoil, and din and uproar, and noise and excitement of worldly business. "Peace, be still." And why? The Sabbath has arrived. It is God's Sabbath appointed by God Himself. There is a sermon of most appealing eloquence in the very striking of the clock which tells that it has come, and the most thoughtless, although they may speedily escape from its influence, cannot at times help feeling the divine care for their immortal spirits. But to the man of a more serious turn the Sabbath speaks with a very different voice. The peace and quiet which mark its birth, seem to him to have a heavenly origin, and he feels that the common thoughts of the common days which have preceded it, should not be allowed to intrude into it. He welcomes it as a day for communing with God and his own soul. He regards himself as a traveller on an elevated point of land between two plains, the past and the future.

When he looks back at the week which is gone, he endeavours to find out in what he has failed in his duty towards God and man. When he turns to the week which is to come, he prays that he may be supported through it, and not again fall as he has fallen before. He is in his place in the house of God as a scholar and a learner, humbly to pray with the prayers, and utter thanks with the thanksgiving, to listen to the portions of Scripture read for his improvement, and to the message of love and salvation which the ministers of the Gospel have to deliver to him.

- Yea, verily, to the Christian man the Sabbath is a gift, a joy, a pleasure, a privilege which the sinner and the worldling can neither understand nor appreciate. And the reason is plain. It is because he is a Christian man. And he is not one man in God's house, and another in his own, but consistently strives to make his own a God's house as far as he can. He would have what I would call a home Sabbath, and keep it with his own family. Now this *home* Sabbath is not enough thought of and

observed by our people. As it has been well observed by a modern writer, too many parents think that if they send their children to the Sunday school they have done every thing for them, and thrown all the responsibility, for good or for evil, for better or for worse, upon the Sunday-school teacher. But this is an immense mistake. Children may learn something, more or less, at the Sunday school from the Sunday-school teacher. But the home-Sunday school is the place where they will learn most, and parents are the Sunday-school teachers whose instructions will have the most influence. You send a child to the Sunday school for an hour or two. He hears that it is God's day, and how it ought to be kept by God's faithful people. But, in too many cases, he returns home to find his mother occupied with all her household affairs, working, toiling, just as on a common week-day, and his father idling, drinking, or counting and calculating and bargaining, and both slovenly and dirty, never thinking of visiting God's house, and listening to the lessons of divine

truth there delivered. What must pass through that child's mind? Which is right, the Sunday-school teacher at the school, or the Sunday-school teacher at home? The influence of the parents with whom he always is naturally prevails. They unteach him all that the other has taught him, and thus one sinful generation follows another. Sabbath-breaking parents make sabbath-breaking children. A wicked parent, indeed, knows not for how many souls he will have to answer before the bar of everlasting judgment.

But, to return from this digression, we have seen the Christian man at home, we have seen him at church, on the Sabbath. Let us walk with him in the fields. There are sermons there also, in every page of the book of nature, and most eloquent they are. He knows, he confesses, he *feels* that he is in the midst of God's works. The trees, the flowers, the growing or ripening crops, all and every thing are preachers from God, voices from God, messengers from God, telling him of the divine love and mercy and providence, and speaking

to him of the all-ruling power, and the all-pervading presence of the Omnipotent. Many a faithful worshipper, standing on this earth as the floor, and with the starry heaven above him as the magnificent roof, of God's temple, has poured forth all his heart and soul before the Lord, laid before Him all his want and need and spiritual case, and renewed the promises and vows and resolutions already pledged in the hour of public prayer. The true Christian sees God always, every where, and in every thing. Are you true Christians?

And now, brethren, consider the text again seriously and carefully. It says to us, "Remember the Sabbath day." And why? It adds, "to keep it holy." The precept is very clear. Unless we remember it, we certainly shall not keep it holy, and we are to remember it that we may keep it holy. This emphatic and expressive language leaves the Sabbath-breaker without excuse. And, as if still farther to press the command upon our hearts with heavenly sanctions, the chapter containing it opens with this remarkable and awful

warning, "God spake all these words." The whole of the Bible, indeed, is from God, but He especially reminds us of it when delivering the commandments, as if anxious that we should accept them with especial reverence. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Neglected Sabbaths tell of neglected souls. "I have had no Sabbaths," exclaimed a dying sinner to the minister of religion who stood by his bed-side. He should have said, "I have kept no Sabbaths;" but he sought to throw the blame upon his employer or the nature of his employment. Now have you ever considered,—probably not, many of you,—how rapidly the Sabbaths to be kept multiply upon you? Let us state it, as a sum in spiritual arithmetic, plainly now. One in seven is one day in seven, one week in seven, one month in seven, one year in seven. And thus the person who has lived seven years has had one year of Sabbaths; the person who has lived fourteen years has had two years of Sabbaths; the person who has lived twenty-one years has had three years of Sabbaths; the person who

has lived twenty-eight years has had four years of Sabbaths; and so on, until, carrying on the tremendous addition, we find that the man who has lived seventy years has had ten years, ten whole years, of Sabbaths, for which he will have to answer before God. This is a new point of view in which to look at the matter to many of you. You have regarded the Sabbath day as it has come and gone as a single day. But the thought of being responsible for whole years of Sabbaths has never entered your minds. It has found its way into them now. Never let it leave them again. Remember that all these Sabbaths, kept or neglected, will be witnesses for or against you on the last day.

Moreover, in the observance of God's Sabbaths, do not adopt that temporizing, compromising spirit with which so many professing Christians treat them. Such persons never think of taking a day or an hour from the week and devoting it to God, but they will, as often as it pleases them, and it pleases them very often, take the Sabbath from God, turn it into a week-

day, and give it to the world. And yet withal these same persons would be greatly amazed and strangely indignant if you classed them among the Sabbath-breakers who disgrace Christianity. And what else shall we, what else can we, call them? What is the amount of their respect and reverence for that seventh day? They will keep it when it pleases them—or when it is convenient to them—when they have no business to transact or journey to accomplish—when the weather is fair and favourable—when they do not expect company at home, or are not about to visit some friend or neighbour—but in all such cases God must give way to man; God's day must be made man's day; God's glory be secondary to man's vanity or pleasure. But the text admits no such trifling. It says plainly and emphatically, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," while the human rule of which we are speaking, tells us to keep it holy, when it suits our own convenience and we have nothing else to do. When David was about "to offer a burnt-offering" to God,

he would not accept the gift tendered to him by Araunah for that purpose, but said piously, "Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." Let the man who would only keep God's Sabbath holy when he has no worldly business, work, or pleasure to occupy it, ponder over these words. David would not sacrifice to God "that which cost him nothing." Shall we only devote to Him the time for which we have no other use and employment?

Finally, brethren, once more I say to you, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." It is a day for praising God for past kindness and praying for future mercies. It is a day for sorrowing for past sins, and supplicating for the help of the Holy Spirit to guide you for the time to come. It is a day, therefore, not to be observed as a form and a ceremony with outward reverence and lip-service only, but a day, as the text expresses it, "to be kept holy." The traveller in the desert

performs the **stages** of his journey between one well of water and another, supported, until he reaches the next, by what he has drawn at the last. And we are travellers through the desert of this world to the Canaan which is beyond, and the Sabbaths are as the wells and fountains of living water from which we must draw our supply to strengthen and support us from stage to stage. You must not bring the week into the Sabbath, but contrariwise, carry the Sabbath and its lessons and holy influences into the week. A formal Sabbath, therefore, is a mockery. The Sabbath, in truth, is the very salt of the week. "But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" Its use is gone, its end perverted, its object destroyed, God's law broken, his Sabbath desecrated, and man plunged into the headlong torrent of worldliness and wickedness. But pray that in your case the salt may be salt indeed, its savour spread from Sabbath to Sabbath over all your week-day actions. This life is not for ever. As at the end of every six days when we have done our

work, God's Sabbath comes, and the faithful Christian rests from his labours, so, when life itself is at an end, and all his work for his Lord and Master done and accomplished, he will be removed for Christ's sake to that blessed "rest which remaineth to the people of God." The Sabbath now is an emblem of the Sabbath then, with this difference—the emblem endures through a few short hours—the reality will abide through all eternity.

SERMON X.

DRUNKENNESS.

1 CORINTHIANS vi. 10.

“ Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

I AM going to address to you to-day some very plain truths in the very plainest words. When we look into the world around us, when we contemplate the daily life of the generality of men, when we watch their conduct, when we see the unchristian doings of so many of these professing Christians, we are at once driven to the conclusion, either that they have very imperfectly read the Bible of God, or that they very imperfectly understand

it, or that they very imperfectly believe it. There is a flaw somewhere. We find them, for instance, regarding some crimes and vices with as much abhorrence as the Scripture expresses in its denunciation of them, while, with regard to other offences against which the voice of the same Scripture raises a testimony equally loud and strong, they look upon them with very different and far more indulgent eyes. The divine rule says emphatically, "Who-soever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." But many, as I said before, do not accept this rule fully and wholly. They see and confess all its application against what they call transgressions of the darkest hue, but withal they are anxious to make exceptions in favour of certain sins which the world, from custom, practice, precedent, and frequency of commission, has grown into the habit of classing and numbering among things, not only pardonable, but altogether guiltless.

As a case in point, let us take an ex-

ample mentioned in the text, that of drunkards. Drunkenness is, in truth, one of the most disgusting and vulgar sins into which a man can fall. And yet how many there are who yield to its temptations! And how lightly is it thought of and spoken of by those who meet the poor, miserable, fallen wretches, madmen for the time, while under its curse and influence, staggering about the streets and disgracing the image of God in which they were created. The more serious sigh, but many smile; some mock and others laugh outright at the degradation of their fellow-creatures. None seem to appreciate and realize the enormity of the sin which is before their eyes. None seem to feel and understand that they are looking upon a slave of Satan, a child of perdition, one of those against whom it is written in the text, "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God." That is a plain sentence—is it not? It is from the Bible. It is too clearly expressed to be either misunderstood or misinterpreted. Carry

it away with you—impress it upon your memory—never forget it. “No drunkards shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

But, before we consider this terrible exclusion from God’s kingdom, let us enumerate some of the awful consequences of drunkenness even in the world that now is.

Drunkenness! Horrible and comprehensive word! It is one of the greatest curses which can possibly overtake a man. It is not only an evil in itself, but it leads to many other evils. It is not only a crime in itself, but it is the prolific parent of many other crimes.

Let us state some of its doings, and recount some of its fatal triumphs over its miserable victims. We read frequently such announcements as the following:—Such and such a man set fire to his clothes or to his house, and perished wretchedly in the flames. *He was in a state of intoxication at the time.*—What a passage to eternity!—Such and such a man has committed murder, has struck down his neighbour or his wife or his child in his fury,

and is sent to prison, and is to be tried for his life at the next assizes. *He was in a state of intoxication at the time.* Such and such a man, returning home, fell from his horse, and was killed upon the spot. *He was in a state of intoxication at the time.* Such and such a man, after being missed for hours, was found frozen to death in a ditch by the wayside. *He was in a state of intoxication at the time.* Such and such a man, falling into the water, was swept away by the rushing tide. *He was in a state of intoxication at the time.* Such and such a man, overtaken by some frightful accident, was carried to his house, with broken limbs and shattered body, groaning with agony and pain, and destined, even if death does not immediately follow, to linger through the remainder of his days a helpless, hopeless cripple. *He was in a state of intoxication at the time.*

What do you think of drunkenness now? But let us go on. Moreover, drunkenness is what we may call a robber sin, and one of the chief of robbers. It steals away a man's respectability. It

steals away a man's character. It steals away a man's property. It steals away a man's strength. It steals away a man's health. It steals away a man's reason. It steals away a man's life. It steals away a man's soul. It shortens, curtails, diminishes, impairs, afflicts all he has in this world, and cuts him off from all hope in that which is to come.

And what do you think of drunkenness now? But let us go on again. We have not half got through the catalogue of its mischievous and terrible powers yet. It makes a man a bad father. It makes a man a bad son. It makes a man a bad husband. It makes a man a bad master. It makes a man a bad servant. It unfits him for every thing. When under its influence, he can neither advise nor listen to advice; he knows not how either to command or obey. He has lost his place and position among his fellow-men. Let the self-made idiot be of what rank he may, nobody heeds or hears his voice. In the midst of life, he is not in death, but actually as dead to those around him.

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The sound of the winds and waves carries as much reason with it as the idle, senseless babbling of the drunkard. And whose house is the picture of wretchedness and misery? Whose hearth-stone and fireplace are cold, cheerless, hopeless, comfortless? Whose wife and children are neglected, abused, and ill-treated, a curse, or perhaps a blow, the ready answer to the cry for food, rags their clothing, no education, but every thing—all his earnings, all their earnings,—consumed and wasted in the vain endeavour to quench his everlasting, ever-burning, ever-increasing thirst? Who falls into dishonest ways that he may satisfy this devilish propensity? Who goes to his bed maddened, with strong drink, and rises in the morning with his mouth parched, his head throbbing, his whole body fevered, his hand shaking, incapable even of working until he has again flown for some false strength to the enemy who is destroying him, both body and soul? And thus the man's life is quickly run out. He becomes old before his time. His wrinkles are not those

of years, but of dissipation. His grey hairs are not the glory of honoured age, but the fruits of a broken and wrecked constitution. He trembles, not under the palsy of disease, but under that of strong drink. It is a fearful picture. But we must neither shrink from exhibiting nor considering it. If we do not deal boldly and resolutely with the malady, how can we hope to cure it?

And what do you think of drunkenness now? But let us go on even farther still. We sometimes meet with a strange form of speech which talks of a person under its influence as of one "disguised in liquor!" How wonderfully true is this old phrase! When under its power, indeed, the rational, thinking, reflecting man, the being so glorious in his origin, created in the image and likeness of God, is disguised, hidden, lost in something more hideous than the irrational brute beast. There is nothing of the man left but this terrible fall even of his fallen nature, to shock the feelings of all who witness his degradation. The people of one great nation of heathen anti-

quity had such a horror of this vice, that, at certain times of the year, they made their slaves drink to intoxication, and then exhibited them before their children, in the conviction that the very spectacle would warn and disgust them into sobriety. But the misfortune is, that a man can only see others in such a state. If the drunkard could but be brought to believe that his folly was like theirs when in the same condition, no sermons would be wanted to turn him from his sin. The eloquence of self-reproach would be sufficient. He would shrink from the very thought that he has ever so exposed himself for the finger of scorn to point at as he passed through life.

And now let us go to the Bible of God for his judgment on this body-corrupting and soul-destroying vice. And what is it? While so many among men carelessly speak of the sin of drunkenness as good fellowship or good companionship, while so many only regret and lament it as a fault to be avoided, but not withal to be severely dealt with, and while so few see it in all

its enormity and foul realities, the inspired volume denounces it as a crime to be visited with the very extremity of punishment. The government of the Israelites upon their settlement in the promised land, was carried on by laws given to them directly and immediately from heaven. God condescended to be their earthly, as well as their heavenly, King. God was their Lawmaker; and so dangerous a member of society, so great a curse upon a people and a country, did the Divine Legislator consider a drunkard to be, that He directed that he should be treated as a pest to the community, to be got rid of, as a cancer to be cut out and destroyed. We are told in the twenty-first chapter of the book of Deuteronomy that, if a man had a son who was "stubborn and rebellious and would not obey his voice, a glutton and a drunkard," he was to bring him before the elders of the city, and, if proved guilty,—what then? We read this awful condemnation in the twenty-first verse: "All the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou

put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."

In the twenty-eighth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, "woe to the drunkards" is denounced in language startlingly splendid and terribly unmistakeable. But no opportunity for rebuking this sin is neglected by the writers in the Old Testament, and no language is too strong for them when they would expose it. They never speak of it with halting and hesitating timidity, but always as a crime, and one of the worst of crimes, and the parent of many other crimes in the sight of God.

When, again, we open the pages of the New Testament, while we find in one place a general rule which tells us that "evil communications corrupt good manners," we find it expressly laid down in another, the eleventh verse of the fifth chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, that "if any man that is called a brother be a drunkard," we are not "to keep company" with him, "with such an one no not to eat." What a wide difference there is between the practice of the world and

the rule set forth by the Apostle! He tells us that we are not to have any friendship with the drunkard; that we are to avoid his company; that we are to keep away from his society; that we are to have nothing to do with him; to turn from him as from a serpent in our path, or poison in our food; to stand aloof from him as from fever, plague, or pestilence: and all this lest his evil example should corrupt us, and draw us into his sinful and destructive habits.

And mark here a very striking peculiarity of expression in the Apostle's words; a very proper one and a very correct one indeed, but still a very peculiar one to men of a lax way of thinking and talking. He says that "if any man that is called a brother be a drunkard." Now, in the first place, we must observe that by the word "brother," as here used, St. Paul means a Christian. The early followers of the Gospel not only loved their Lord as the Saviour of their souls, but they also loved "the brethren in Christ" for their Lord's sake. They spoke of each other as brothers; they felt towards each other as

brothers; they treated each other as brothers. And thus it was brought about that the word brother came, when employed by one of them in speaking of another, to signify a disciple, a follower of Christ, a Christian. It is so used in this place. Bearing this explanation in mind, we now get at the peculiarity and reality of the Apostle's meaning. "If any man," he writes, "that is called a brother," that is, a Christian, "be a drunkard." Weigh the sentence well and deeply. It is a sermon, it is the pith and marrow of a thousand sermons, in one, two, three, in just eleven words. A careless or thoughtless writer, ninety-nine perhaps out of a hundred of every day and commonplace persons, might have said, "If any man that is a Christian be a drunkard." But St. Paul was not a teacher to be caught so erring. He purposely and particularly puts it, "If any man that is called a Christian." You must now see all the depth and force and importance of the lesson which he would impart. He does not allow that the drunkard is a Christian. He is called a Christian, but he is not one.

He has the name, not the reality. A Christian cannot be a drunkard, and a drunkard cannot be a Christian. "If any man that is called a Christian!" It is, indeed, an arrow winged with a mighty truth. And its application and strength are as mighty now as they were when the Apostle penned the sentence. The drunkard in these days may, by the world's custom, be spoken of as a Christian, because he lives in a Christian land; but he is not a Christian of the Christianity which Jesus and his Apostles preached. He has neither part nor lot in that. He is called a Christian, but we might find other words which would more accurately describe what he really and truly is.

What, then, does drunkenness accomplish for its victim even in this world? It wastes his substance, makes him idle, leads him into dishonest practices, impairs his reason, weakens his strength, destroys his health, shortens his days, and digs his grave for him before his time. And, with regard to the next world, the text tells us, that "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom

of God." What, then, is to become of this wretched, miserable sinner? Is he an outcast from all hope? Is he beyond the reach of prayer? Is he beyond the power of grace? Not so, blessed be the God of love and mercy, not so, indeed. He is now the slave of "the powers of darkness." He is now the captive of the "strong man armed." But he may yet, if he will turn to Him, find a Helper more powerful than "the powers of darkness," and stronger far than "the strong man armed." Among the Corinthian Christians there were some who had been drunkards. The Apostle tells us so in the verse immediately following the text: "And such were some of you." But what does he tell us farther? He goes on: "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." These Corinthian Christians had been heathens, ignorantly worshipping dumb idols of wood and stone. But a change, a great and glorious and blessed change, was about to come upon them. The voice of glad tidings was about to be

raised in their streets. That eloquence which startled kings upon their thrones, and made the mighty of the earth tremble as it reasoned with them, was about to be heard among the marble palaces, the gorgeous temples, and golden roofs of Corinth the Magnificent. There arrived among them a missionary, and one of the chief of missionaries, a preacher, and one of the chief of preachers. It was an Apostle. It was St. Paul. For months and months he made Corinth, as it were, his parish, and never did teacher of the Gospel devote himself more earnestly and entirely to his parish work. Unceasingly did he proclaim "the truth as it is in Jesus." Untiringly did he set forth that "holy of holies," the soul-saving doctrine of "Christ crucified." And great was the success which crowned his labours. "Many of the Corinthians," we read in the eighteenth chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, "hearing believed, and were baptized." They had been open and unrebuked sinners under their old idolatry, but they now became other and new men. And amongst other

classes of evil doers, there had been drunkards also. But they had become sober under the influence of the Gospel. "Such were some of you," says the Apostle to them. Blessed words! for they speak of the past. "Such WERE some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." And now what remains for me to say? You have heard these words. Treasure them in your hearts, and fly to them as to an ark of safety. God's mercy is not less than it was when it was extended to the Corinthians. The Gospel is not less mighty to teach than it was when St. Paul preached it. The power of Christ to save is not less efficacious than it was when the early converts threw themselves, in the fulness of faith, upon his atonement. The influences of the Holy Spirit are not less able to convert the heart and soul than they were when extended to, and accepted by, the first Christians. God remains ever the same, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" the same in power, the same in love, the

same anxious and kind and merciful Father, watching for the return of the prodigal, and ready both to help him on his way and welcome him to his home. Oh, then, be persuaded! Close with his offers. Listen to his voice. Pray for the strength of the Holy Spirit to enable you to leave your sinful courses. Throw yourselves fully and wholly upon the sacrifice of your Redeemer. And do not hesitate. The time is short; and, if you die in your iniquity,—what then? “No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

S E R M O N XI.

LOT'S WIFE.

LUKE xvii. 32.

“Remember Lot’s wife.”

IN the previous verses which form the context to these words, our Lord had been addressing a solemn warning to his hearers, which, like most of his instructions, bears a primary and secondary application. He spoke, in the first instance, of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies, and intended the lesson as a caution to his disciples to flee from the wrath which was impending over, and would presently fall upon, their sinful countrymen. But He also meant to warn

all generations of men to the end of time, that they should be constantly prepared to face their summons to eternity. Received in this signification, his words do but in another form convey his own precept, "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." It is in this last sense that we will consider it. Heaven knows, it conveys to us a lesson oftener before our eyes and more required than any other, yet least of all in our hearts and minds. We must go back a few verses to make us understand the text in all its emphatic meaning. "As it was in the days of Noe," says our Lord, "so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back." After this solemn charge to be ever vigilant and watchful, our Lord goes on to give it a greater strength and force by this short reference to the fall of one in days gone by. His words are, "Remember Lot's wife."

Our first employment, then, must be to turn to an earlier page of Bible history, thence to ascertain the peculiar circumstances which give a point and an emphasis to the example brought before us by Christ as a warning against being too devoted to, too fond of, too eager after, a world from which we may be withdrawn at any moment—"Remember Lot's wife." We go to the nineteenth chapter of the book of Genesis, and read that, when it was the will of God to destroy the cities of the plain for their iniquities, He determined, of his good pleasure, to rescue Lot from the impending

ruin. Accordingly, two angels, commissioned by the Most High, were sent to warn him of the destruction which was coming upon the sinners amongst whom he dwelt, and to exhort him, together with all the members of his family, to flee from the place upon which the curse of God was about to rest for ever. Lot at once listened, believed, and obeyed. Of his family, his sons-in-law, we are told, refused to depart with him. Their faith was small, and when he talked to them of what was approaching, he only "seemed as one that mocked unto them." They remained, and were overwhelmed in the common destruction. So it always is with the wicked. They defy and scoff at God's judgments until they are actually upon them. Then comes the truth of the proverb, that "experience makes even fools wise," but the wisdom so acquired is of little use when the bolt has fallen, and crushed its victims. Lot's wife and daughters, however, were persuaded to leave the doomed city in which they had been dwelling, and, led by the angels of God, went forth by the path

of safety which the divine mercy had opened to them. But although all four went forth, and had the same means and way of flight offered to them, only three of them finally escaped. Lot and his daughters reached the city of refuge to which they had been directed by the angels; but his wife did not. We read, "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." It has been supposed that part of the awful shower which came down from heaven to destroy the cities of the plain, fell upon her, and fixed her, wrapped in its sulphurous shroud, upon the very spot where she was standing when she disobeyed the divine command. Be that, however, as it may; the pillar, with all its awful and heart-stirring reminiscences and associations, remained, we are assured by Josephus, in his days. Such was her punishment; but what was her sin? "She looked back," when the decisive command given by the angels was, "Look not behind thee,"—"Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the moun-

tain, lest thou be consumed." She looked back, you see, when she ought to have been looking forward. She *looked* back, but was it only a look which she cast back upon the scenes of iniquity which she was leaving, or was her heart wafted back again on the wings, as it were, of that look; was it the index of feelings which were at work within her; a longing, lingering look of regret at being separated from friendships which she had formed; or at again being thrown as a wanderer upon the world after settling at last, as perhaps she thought, in a place of rest? Fancy may answer as it may, and picture the anatomy of her heart with all the freedom of its will: all we know for certain is this: the divine command was emphatic and decided: "Look not behind thee," and she did look behind, and forthwith her punishment fell upon her,—“She became a pillar of salt.”

And now, brethren, having laid before you the history to which our Lord refers in the text, let me appeal to you by the same warning, and to every soul here present address the words, “Remember

Lot's wife." When we look closely at the awful example thus held out to us, we shall see much, if we will analyze all the particulars connected with it, we shall see many points, which will afford rather a startling parallel to the condition of many a professing Christian at the present day. She was one who had much to be thankful for to God both for the spiritual and temporal blessings which she had enjoyed. She was the wife of Lot, who had been very mercifully dealt with by Providence, having had his fortunes linked in, as it were, with those of the faithful Abraham, had been a prosperous man in an earthly point of view, and, above all, had been blessed with a light and knowledge of the true God when all around were buried in the intensity of heathen darkness. And is there not in these things a likeness to many of you? To many of you there is, even as to worldly gifts and possessions; but to all of you, as to the superior spiritual advantages which she enjoyed. You are in a land where the true light of the Gospel sheds its brightest beams. You

are members of a Church which, resting her foundations on the Scriptures, "the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible," shuns the contact of degrading superstition on the one hand, and the infection of wild fanaticism on the other. The word of God is open to you; nothing of the truth is withheld from you; you have it in your power to search and examine, to try and sift, for yourselves, to take counsel with God Himself in his own Book, and to draw the waters of life from the very fountain from which their stream wells forth in heavenly sweetness, purity, and love. "Remember, then, Lot's wife." With her advantages she fell.—Beware, lest with yours, you fall also.

Again, the wife of Lot was not left to make her own way and secure her own escape from the wicked city where she dwelt. The angels of God were sent to warn her and to plead with her and to take her by the hand and assist her forth; and yet—Oh, the frailty, the folly, the thoughtlessness, the weakness of human nature!—yet she was lost. But what shall

we say? Was she alone in her infatuation, alone in her fall, in the face of such light, such knowledge, such offers of spiritual help and aid? What are crowds of the nominal Christians of the world doing? The very same. If the angels warned her, God's Bible warns them; if the angels pleaded with her, the Holy Spirit pleads with them; if the angels took her by the hand and led her on the way, the same Spirit will, if you drive Him not from you, lead and support you, be your guide and guardian in every hour of trial and vicissitude, and still bear you on in the path of life, victorious over every temptation which may assail and strive to beguile you to your ruin. Oh, scorn not these heavenly helpers, or your fall is certain. "Remember Lot's wife." That mysterious pillar, at once her shroud and coffin, grave and monument, fixed at the gate of Zoar, appeals to you, warns you, urges you, not to throw away the assistance which God offers you, but to walk on "in the whole armour of God," and in his strength, to battle with, and overthrow those spiritual

enemies, before whom you must inevitably fall without it.

Again, we must observe that Lot's wife, although in the event she "looked back" and was punished for her disobedience, yet had previously made some progress on her way from the scenes of iniquity where she had been residing. And how many are there amongst the followers of the Gospel who are constantly doing the same thing? They seem to have renounced their sinful courses in very earnestness, and "to have taken up their cross and to be following Christ" in all sincerity. But the result shows that their strength is not the strength we thought it. In some evil hour when they are weaker, or temptation is more powerful, than usual, they halt and falter in the heavenward path in which they have been walking. They become irresolute—their feeble knees faint and totter beneath them. How is it to be? For a moment the crisis of their fate seems to tremble upon the balance. The struggle is over. It is Lot's wife over again—*they look back*—they return to the

world, and to the sins and the pleasures, and the companions and the haunts which, it was hoped, they had forsaken for ever—*they look back*, and they go back—they never look forward—they never move forward—any more. What we took for a steady light in the spiritual horizon, was but a meteor flashing for a moment across the darkness, and then disappearing to make the gloom seem more intense, after the unreal mockery of light has passed away. Such men are constantly to be met with, by turns kindling and baffling hope by the eccentric course of spirituality in which they travel, and proving too awfully and too fatally the truth of Christ's words: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

But let us take a more general view of the subject than we have yet done, for the charge given in the text—"Remember Lot's wife"—has a very sweeping application, when we include in the account all those vast crowds who are sinning after the similitude of the fashion in which she

sinned. Men are here in a state of probation, with eternity before them, and death, it may be, at hand to introduce them into that eternity at any moment. Now, what are the great bulk of mankind doing? How are they employed? As to what they ought to be doing, there can be no question. They ought to have their thoughts and their faith and their hearts set upon that future life which is about to dawn upon them, and they ought to conduct themselves here accordingly; but what are they doing? Are they acting as men who are *looking forward* into eternity, or as men who are *looking back*, and clinging with a miser-like tenacity of grasp to the flying moments as they recede from them? Make the self-application of these questions, and God grant that you can answer favourably and answer truly at the same time! Happy are you, if you can. But however that may be, when we look into the world, and contemplate what is going on in it, when we look at what those clever, as they are thought, sons and daughters of Adam who are called

men of the world and women of the world, are doing day by day, we must be blind, indeed, if we are not ready to admit that a very large majority of mankind are not of those who may be numbered as children of light. Far otherwise. It is now as it was in the days of which our Lord spoke. "They are eating, drinking, marrying, being given in marriage, buying, selling, planting, building"—they are doing these things, and they are doing more—they are occupied with every worldly business, every worldly care—they have time for every thing connected with this perishable body and this fleeting life; but they have no time for the things of the soul and eternity. The world, in some shape or way, is their idol, their deity, their god. Let it wear before them what attractive form it may, it is still the same tempter. Riches, greatness, gaiety, dissipation, pleasure, are but mirrors that multiply its beams, and still reflect the world upon us as the centre of their adoration. Upon this object of worship, men fix their hearts and souls with a fatal devotion which it

is most difficult to weaken. They, like Lot's wife, *look back*, when all their thoughts and hopes and anxieties ought to be bent forward. They would fain be for ever "of the earth earthy," when all their aspirations and longings should be, that they may one day be "of the heaven heavenly," and all their care be given, that such may be the case with them; their prayers directed to the throne of grace, that they may be brought to God in Christ, reconciled to the Father through the blood of the eternal Son, that, whenever the frail thread of human life is snapt in twain, they may be received into the mansions of the blessed for ever and ever.

To you, then, let me once again address the words of the text. "Remember Lot's wife." Whenever you are tempted to renounce your faith in Christ and give way to sin—whenever you are solicited to turn a deaf ear to the pleadings of the Spirit of God and to listen to the voice of the spirit of evil—in all such seasons, and under all such circumstances, recollect that you may be struck down in the very

moment of your sin and summoned to eternity as suddenly as she was. "She looked back," and the living woman was no more—a pillar of salt occupied the place where she stood the moment before. And death may come upon any man now just as quickly in the midst of his transgressions, although it may not approach in the same form—it may lurk in the air, it may meet him by the way-side or in the waters, or it may assail him by the paralyzing stroke which does its work in an instant—and dust is dust. And oh, brethren! what a warning should this thought of this eternity upon us, around us, on every side of us, from which we are only severed by the bubble of human life, which may burst at any moment—what a warning should it read to us! How it should startle the children of mammon from their unrighteous covetousness! How it should disturb the proud man as he weaves the web of his ambition! How, like the handwriting upon the wall, should it confront the man of pleasure in the haunts of vice and dissipation! How, with

the still small voice of conscience, should it whisper in the ears of the sons and daughters of vanity decked out for admiration, gaiety, and never-ending amusements and gratifications, "You are immortal beings—you have souls, never-dying souls, whose welfare is at stake—do you not forget it—pause—reflect—are these the scenes in which they can be disciplined for heaven?" And how, on the contrary, does the same solemn thought inspire the true Christian with a more lively faith and a more earnest hope! How does it make him cling and cleave more closely to his Saviour-God? How lead him, with more complying readiness, to bend his heart and mind to the guidance of the Holy Spirit? It was this thought of eternity and of the blessings which eternity will bring with it for Christ's true disciples, which acted as an anchor of hope, of strong and unconquerable hope, upon St. Paul and his fellow-workers. Hear his exclamation: "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an

house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And what could alarm or terrify or tempt men with whom such a knowledge had, under the divine grace, grown into such a faith that nothing could shake or move it? They looked forward, not back; their hearts were in the next life, not in this; the power of earthly things, then, exercised no influence over them; the fear of man had died away in them; pleasure had lost its charms, mere temporal gratification its attractions; the world had ceased to dazzle them, or the things of the world to beguile them; they cared not for trials; they met dangers unmoved; they had no terrors of those who could only kill the body:—and how was all this? It was the triumph of faith within them; faith had drawn aside the veil between them and eternity, and they saw there their Saviour-God, no longer as the persecuted and crucified Jesus, snatched from his lowly followers by an ignominious and cruel death, but sitting as Lord of lords and King of kings upon the throne of his majesty and power, until that day when all

generations of men shall be gathered before Him, and his own shall hear from Him the joyful words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." And, oh, let us pray that the same knowledge and the same faith may, by the divine grace, produce the same effects in our hearts! No more let us look back with fond delight upon a world which is rapidly—oh, how rapidly!—gliding from beneath our feet, but forward, onward, let our high and holy gaze be fixed upon eternity, "our affections set upon things above, not on things on earth." The warning given of old, is given to us also, and the same divine help is at hand to carry us to safety. "Escape for thy life: look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." Yea, let us pray that we may escape for our life, that we may not look behind at the sins which we have left, or cast back a single pang of regret at parting with them, but fly from them altogether, and make our way to the

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mountain, even to the rock of our salvation, which is Christ Jesus. There is no other hope, no other path to heaven for us, but through his name. He says Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Let us, then, seek salvation through this one only road to it. Let us not, as is common with man, look proudly or fondly at our charities, our morality, our works, and then delude ourselves with the thought of human vanity, Lo, here is our bridge to heaven; but, adding to those charities in a hundredfold degree if possible, increasing our morality to a higher point of strictness, going on in the work of works, still let us regard these things but as so many evidences and proofs of our discipleship to Christ Jesus, and, casting away all pride, rejecting the very idea of human merit, throw ourselves at the foot of the cross, and leave our cause, our souls, our salvation to Him who died upon it, saying with the poor publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner," or with the sinking Peter on the sea of Galilee, "Lord,

save me," or I perish. And, finally, recollect, one and all, that you are walking through the world as through a field of battle. Death is busy on every side of you, and may be busy with you next. The fingers of the clock move forward, and the time is short. While it lasts, fly from sin, resist temptation. "Remember Lot's wife," and look not behind you at the pleasures of the world, but go on, in faith, by grace, from holiness to holiness, and from one Christian work to another. The end is approaching. Cleave unto Christ Jesus, and to Him leave all the rest.

S E R M O N X I I .

LOT'S WIFE.

GENESIS xix. 17.

“Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.”

WHEN the chastisement of their iniquities was about to fall upon the wicked inhabitants of the cities of the plain, it pleased the Almighty to send two angels to warn Lot of the coming destruction, and to exhort him to fly from it. The issue of their mission is thus told: “And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here;

lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

But I am not going to dwell upon the history of Lot. I rather purpose to take the words which have been just read to you, as with a spiritual meaning and application attached to them, and so addressing a lesson and a warning to every follower of the Gospel.

In the first place, you will observe that, although Lot believed the divine message conveyed to him by the angels, and prepared to leave the accursed and doomed city, yet is it written of him that "he lingered." He did not doubt the word of God, but he did not rush to obey it.

He delayed, he deferred, he paused, he hesitated, when instant decision, instant action, and instant flight were required. "He lingered." Like the Roman, perhaps, he would, if left to himself, have waited for a more "convenient season;" or, at all events, like the father of the child afflicted with the deaf and dumb spirit, he had great need to pray. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Lot, then, "lingered," not doubting, but believing, and yet, although believing, not hastening to add obedience to his faith. But what happened to the "lingering" man who, seeing that sudden destruction was about to fall upon the place in which he dwelt, still paused upon its very verge and made no haste to escape from it, as if fascinated and rooted to the spot by some attraction in the very terrors which were approaching? We read that, "while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without

the city." How applicable is all this to the case of the generality of professing Christians! Disbelieve it, doubt it, deny it, contradict it, as you may, we are all apt to be lingerers amidst the pleasures and gratifications, so called, of the world. We know their vanity, we have felt the keen recoil of their disappointment; but still we too often linger on. The moth, drawn to the candle which dazzles and burns it, is our type and representative. But shall we linger and die? Or, how are we to break from the thralldom which encircles us with its chains? Oh! the glory! the magnitude! the immensity of the divine love! While Lot, in his madness, "lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand," "the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." You see, there was a gentle force used to tear him from his dangerous position. The angels "laid hold upon his hand," and saved him from himself; and the cause of this blessed compulsion is clearly stated, "the Lord being merciful unto him." What an explanation

of the mysterious workings of God's providence is here set before us! Lingerers, loiterers, idlers in a world whose nothingness you see, but will not abandon, how are you to be disturbed in your folly? Prosperity only confirms you in your attachment to it. The still small voice of conscience is not heard. The whisperings of the Spirit are unheeded. You have forgotten yourselves, but God has not forgotten you. He is still "as merciful" as He was to Lot, and still as ready to employ his "constraining love" to snatch you from the consequences of your sins. What is to be done? Are you to be left unwarned? Are you to perish in your iniquities without an effort made to save you? Not so. God who knows that the value of all the world is nothing compared with the price of an immortal soul, still watches over you, and cares for you. You linger as Lot lingered, then must you be treated as Lot was treated, and as he was forced from impending destruction, so must you be forced from it. Do you begin to understand? Has your con-

fidence in the world never been disturbed by the crashing of the thunderbolts of misfortune at your feet? Has poverty found you out? Has affliction marked you for its victim? Has sickness laid low all the pride of health and strength? Has death invaded your house and taken from you some beloved one of the affections? Well, and why? Pause, think, reflect, these things have happened to you, "the Lord being merciful unto you." What men ignorantly call calamities, are often messengers of love. They are as the guardian angels of God to lead you forth from the dangers and temptations which beset your path and threaten the perdition of your souls. And so are we brought fully to comprehend and appreciate all the mighty truth, all the blessed value, and all the sweet consolation, contained in those glorious words of the Apostle, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth;" first making their spirits pure, and then purer still by passing them through the furnace of afflic-

tion, even as silver comes forth purified from the refiner's fire.

We now go on to the text. "And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." In carrying out the purpose which I had in view when I selected this passage of Scripture for the subject of our considerations, we must regard the "plain" spoken of as typical, in a spiritual sense, of the world with its low level of morality, tastes, habits, thoughts, feelings, and practice. The unbeliever, he is a dweller on the plain; the drunkard, he is a dweller on the plain; the dishonest man, he is a dweller on the plain; the covetous, the sabbath-breaker, the swearer, "the lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God," the proud, the formalist, the hypocrite, all these are dwellers on the plain; and it is from the company and ranks of these, from the corruption of their evil communications, and

from a resemblance to their sinful conduct that we are to escape.

We are to "escape for our life," not merely for the life which now is, but for the sake of the everlasting life which is to follow. The appeal to Lot only affected his mortal body of dust and ashes. We include in it the immortal soul. How the motive for escape is enhanced in our case! It is eternity against time.

But our escape is to be complete. "*We are not to stay in all the plain.*" We are told in the second commandment that "the Lord our God is a jealous God." He will admit of no compromise. He will tolerate no half dominion, no divided empire, over our hearts and souls. He demands from us our pledged and plighted truth, as promised for us at our baptism. He asks for our entire affection, a love whole and abiding and trusting in Him. If we think to make our religion but a kind of pastime to come in its turn with the other employments of life, or a mere sabbath-day business not affecting, guiding, and mingling with our weekly conduct; or a fleeting thought never set-

tling seriously upon our minds, and wrestling with our wills in our hours of privacy or in the night-watches, then are we most miserably self-deceived. We are dragging down heavenly things to the petty and wretched standard of an earthly judgment. We are still tarrying in the very centre of the plain, when the divine command is that "we shall not stay in all of it," that is, in any part of it. And herein is God consistent with Himself, for, in one passage of Scripture, we are told, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all;" while in another we read, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."

"Neither are we to look behind us." Our blessed Lord Himself tells us, that "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God;" and again, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." These passages of Scripture are very clear and very decisive, and yet it is to be feared that they are frequently sinned against even by men

from whom we might hope for better things. What do they command? They do not simply charge us not to go back to the sins from which we have once escaped, but tell us not even to look back at them. We are not to hanker after and long to return to them. We are not, after leaving them, still to coquet with them in our affections, and think of them with regret. We are not still, as too many do, to enjoy them in the day-dreams of our fancy, or to allow our imagination to go on castle-building in the realms of iniquity. And such a charge is most wisely addressed to us. It is dangerous to play with fire. It is foolish to walk on the brink of a precipice, when one false step, or the slightest giddiness, may plunge you into the depths below. But it is more dangerous, it is more foolish, to feed the eye, or the mind's eye, with the contemplation of the pomps and vanities and sins of the world. It is courting trial and wooing temptation to the assault. Moreover, in such cases, the eye is only the watch-tower of the heart, the inlet and outlet by which it commu-

nicates with things external. Or, to come plainly to the point, we are here speaking entirely of the inner eye of the heart, and not of the outer eye at all. Besides, if we still look back with fond and lingering regret upon the sins which we have left, what in reality is our spiritual state? The divine grace has not yet accomplished its perfect work within us. We are striving to serve two masters. Fear draws us towards God, but our love is yet with the world. *There* is still our treasure, if we dared to enjoy and use it, and we know, on the highest of all authorities, that "where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also." And the only partition-wall between our hearts and our hearts' desire is fear, a most feeble and uncertain barrier when the tide of passion comes rolling in against it. Most earnestly, therefore, should we pray for the love of Christ to take full possession of us. Then, but not till then, shall we be in safety. With the love of Christ supreme and triumphant within us, we shall look forward towards the heaven of heavens, not back

upon the world. Grace will support us. Hope will cheer us. Faith will inspire us. The things future and eternal will be the only things precious and valuable in the eyes of the converted man, the true Christian.

We now come to the last portion of the charge given by the angels:—“*Escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*” As we spoke of the plain as the type of the world, with its low level of morality, tastes, habits, thoughts, feelings, and practice, so we accept the mountain as representing the steep ascent to those higher, and purer, and holier regions of Christian faith and righteousness which the Gospel sets before us. On the summit of this holy mountain, far beyond cloud and sky, in the presence of God Himself, stands the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city, towards which the Christian pilgrim is to bend his way. The mountain is high and steep, and the path by which we are to climb it is strait and narrow. But up it is the only way of escape. Let us, with prayer for the help of the Holy Spirit, attempt it. But it

must be with a resolute purpose of accomplishing it. There must be no faltering, no halting, no standing still on the road. Up, up, up; higher, higher, higher; and up, up, higher, higher, still. The one step taken is instantly to be followed by another step to be taken, and all forwards, upwards, higher, higher. St. Paul praises his Thessalonian converts for having advanced some distance up the holy mountain. But he does not then tell them to pause, to rest satisfied in the thought that all was done and accomplished. Contrariwise, he adds in words of earnestness and seriousness, "Furthermore then, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more." And, in another place, speaking of his own spiritual state, he says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this

one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Is not this plain? Nothing could be plainer. The Christian's work must only end with the Christian's life. While it lasts, there must be a "forgetting of those things which are behind;" there must be a reaching forth unto those things which are before." There must be a "pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." There must be all this and nothing else, all this and nothing less.

And now, brethren, as I draw to a conclusion, let me ask you in all seriousness, Why you should tarry in the plain when God invites and warns you to escape from it? What are its best treasures if you can obtain them; and, if obtained, can you keep them, and how long? "Vanity of vanities," is all that can be said of its most precious gifts, both as to their time of endurance and their powers of gratifi-

cation. Every thing here below is fleeting, changeable and changing, perishable and perishing, subject to moth and rust, decay, decline, corruption, death. Riches make to themselves wings, and flee away. Friendships fail. Health is uncertain. Misery and distress beset our path. The sweetest and the most beautiful, the fairest and the most brilliant, the ablest and the most learned, all are bowed down in turn by grief and sorrow, all travel to the same grave, brought to it by slow disease, by long and racking pain, or cut off by the sudden stroke in the midst of their strength and the prime of their days. And shall our hearts and affections loiter here among the tombs in such a world as this? The child, if asked to choose its portion of the harvest, might fix upon the red poppies and other bright coloured flowers and weeds which the idle hand of the husbandman has left amongst it. But do not ye make such a selection when the spiritual harvest is spread before you. Be children no longer, "become men, and put away childish things." Reject the flowers and tares,

and take the wheat. "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." Do you still linger? Do you say that you have not strength to accomplish such a work? Oh, men, men, speak out; you mean to say that you have not faith for it! Has not Christ told us that "his grace is sufficient for us?" Has He not promised "to be with us alway, even unto the end of the world?" Approach Him, therefore, not despairing, but confiding; approach Him with earnest and sincere prayer, not doubting, but believing, and then fear not for the issue. As the angels of God "laid hold upon the hand of Lot" to guide him from destruction, so will the Holy Spirit lead and sustain you. The plain will be left. The mountain will be reached. Toil on, pilgrims of the Lord, toil on a little longer, resting upon the same grace, and your trials will be over. The heaven of heavens is at hand, and it is for the faithful in Christ Jesus.

SERMON XIII.

MEDITATION.

GENESIS xxiv. 63.

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide.”

THE Scripture relates few particulars about the life of the patriarch Isaac. He was a link in the pedigree of the chosen people. He was Abraham's son and Jacob's father, but his own career was not marked by any of the stirring events, nor his character distinguished by the spirit of enterprise, which fix our attention with so much interest upon the histories of his immediate predecessor and his immediate successor. He seems to have been a person of quiet

and retiring habits and of domestic tastes, more a man of contemplation than of action. It is as such that the text places him before us, as it says of him, "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide;" there, doubtless, pondering over God's love and God's works, communing with his own heart, and humbly thanking the Almighty for the especial favour bestowed upon the family to which he belonged. But on all these points the sacred writer is silent. He satisfies himself with setting before us the fact that "Isaac went out to meditate in the field," and this fact so stated we accept and place before you as an example for your guidance and imitation. I do not know whether it has ever struck any of you, but there is no doubt that those who lead a country life possess, in the very facilities and opportunities which they have for meditation, one great spiritual advantage over the dwellers in large towns and cities. These last, hurried along by the everlasting whirl and rush and roar of worldliness, tossed to and fro in the vortex of com-

petition, unsettled in thought by the perpetual din and bustle, and activity and novelty which every hour of every day produces, excited, depressed, astonished, dazzled by the stirring events which surround them, are strongly tempted to forget God and his works and his power, and to see only man and man's hand and man's ingenuity in the whole scene before them. There is no room, indeed, for the Divine Creator in all their thoughts. Things human and temporal monopolize them altogether. But, on the contrary, the inhabitant of the country is exposed to no such temptation. The objects amidst which he dwells, instead of conspiring to lead him *from* God, combine to lead him *to* God. His thoughts are not in continual contact with miles of streets, bricks and mortar, dazzling shop-windows, the busy haunts of business, buying, selling, dealing at all times and in all places, with the mind ever on the stretch to achieve some striking bargain or some great advantage. His occupation carries him into far different scenes. He is perpetually walk-

ing with the handwriting of God, if I may so speak, before his eyes. He is ever in the presence of the divine works which are so many preachers continually reminding him of their Divine Creator. The grass, the trees, the flowers—they are the messengers of God—hear them; they are the missionaries of God—heed them. It is thus that our blessed Lord Himself, in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, makes the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field witnesses both of the power and providence of the Almighty, and directs us to derive instruction from the lessons which they can impart to us.

But let us proceed to point out the subjects on which you may and should meditate, when employed in your daily occupations in the fields, or in your walks of leisure in them when your toils are over.

In the first place, meditation should dwell upon the omnipotence and omnipresence of God as set before us in the order and harmony and regularity of his

works. Day following night and night day, the seasons coming in their regular succession, the sun ripening the fruits and harvests, the former and the latter rain—all these proclaim to us, not only a God all-powerful to create, but a God ever-present to guide, direct, and control his mighty works. The ignorant and the idiot to whom grass is grass, flowers are flowers, and trees, trees, and nothing more, having neither voice nor speech nor language to declare their Maker, bearing neither the image nor superscription of God upon them, who see in the sun only a vast illumination to guide their steps, without raising their thoughts to Him who said, "Let there be light: and there was light"—such persons, in their folly, ascribe every thing to chance. But the idiot's chance is the reflecting man's Providence. Chance cannot be the parent of order. Chance cannot perpetuate a succession of things done and accomplished in unvarying harmony and regularity. It contradicts itself and ceases to be, when such is the case. The very word betokens a casualty, an

accident, an exception to some general rule. And the general rule in the management of nature, that is, of God's works, is one of such wonderful sameness and exactness, that we can calculate the tides, the rising and the setting of the sun and moon, the length of the day and night, eclipses, and many other events to come, with an accuracy which never fails. The man of a meditative turn of mind confesses and acknowledges all this at once. In the midst of God's works he feels that he is in the presence of God Himself, and recognises his providence as well as his power in every thing around him.

Meditation may also, with immense profit to the soul, dwell upon the love and mercy of God towards fallen man, even in a temporal point of view. Joseph, we are told in Scripture, laid up corn during the seven years of plenty for the seven years of famine which were to follow. Now, does it ever strike you, as you walk through your golden harvests, that the whole wide surface of the world is also in the hands of God, a mighty, perpetual,

ever renewed and renewing granary, in which He stores up food for the use of his creatures? Here is employment for thought and meditation. The same power which nourished the Israelites on manna in the wilderness, the same power which fed hungry thousands on a few small loaves and fishes, is still in active operation in our behalf. The miracle is not less a miracle because it is made permanent. It is still of God, and from God. A word from Him and all our supplies would be cut off. Too much or too little sunshine, too much or too little rain, a deluge or a drought, a blight in the air, a fly in the ear, a worm at the root—all these are weapons of wrath in the armoury of God; and if He but spoke it, the earth would at once become a desert under their ravages, and man, proud man, with all his confidence, all his skill, and all his cleverness, perish miserably from the face of it. Yes! brethren, what we thoughtlessly look upon as things common and things of course, are, in point of fact, the things of God, his free gifts to us, standing witnesses against

all those who do not accept and appreciate, and acknowledge and feel them as such.

But meditation has many other mercies of God to consider and ponder over. Not only have we to thank Him for compelling the earth to yield its fruits of increase for our sustenance and support, but for all that we have to hold and enjoy. It is God who blesses the industry of man. It is God who endows him with all things which minister to his temporal comfort and gratification. He is the Giver of our strength. He bestows the inestimable blessing of health. He is the Lord of life and death, and we but tenants at his will in these perishable tabernacles of dust and ashes. Has not meditation, then, ample work before it? But it has higher and nobler themes to occupy its thoughts, than any which affect this fleeting world and these frail bodies. Pass we from the things of time to the things of the soul and of eternity. If God's mercy and compassion are manifested in caring for us and providing for us in the short pil-

grimage from the cradle to the grave, oh, how are the treasures of his ineffable love displayed before us in the scheme of redemption prepared and wrought out for our immortal souls! Man created in a state of innocence, man fallen—death and sin rushing into the world—a Saviour promised, a Saviour born, unknown to man, but amidst the swelling chorus of the angelic host; a Saviour crucified; a Saviour raised from the dead, his resurrection the type of ours; baptism enjoined, the importance of faith proclaimed, the Gospel preached, the study of the Scriptures commanded, the help of the Holy Spirit pledged in answer to the voice of sincere prayer, the fall of idolatry, a converted world, a day of judgment—all these furnish topics for meditation so strange, so wonderful, so marked by mercy and omnipotence alike, so appealing and yet so appalling, so attractive and withal so alarming, so striking and so awful, that the mind of man is lost in the blaze of combined love and power which they reveal. All his faculties are on the strain and stretch

as he contemplates them. The more he thinks of them, the more he finds them to be worthy of thought. What trifles are the toys and flowers of time when placed side by side with these glimpses into eternity.

And meditation has other works to perform. The mourner, as he walks through the fields, may draw sweet consolation and heavenly comfort from it. St. Paul, in that splendid chapter which the Church has appointed to be read as part of the Burial Service, thus writes: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." When you sow for the harvest here, you scatter the seed in the ground and leave the rest to God. Where sight fails, there faith takes up the prospect. "And so also,"

adds the Apostle, “is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” The grave is the gate of the resurrection. The sun sets only to rise again. The to-day of time, will be followed by the to-morrow of eternity, where these spiritualized bodies, clothed with incorruption, glory, and power, shall dwell in the heaven of heavens in the presence of their God. We grieve for the departed now—we shall rejoice then—let faith peer forth into the future, and wipe away all tears from the eyes, as it hears “a voice from heaven saying to it, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours.”

So far I have spoken of meditation upon the works and love of God as an advantage to the Christian probationer for heaven. But I cannot finish without insisting upon

its necessity. Meditation, under the divine grace, must be the parent of faith; and the melancholy lack of it amongst men is, I have no hesitation in saying, the reason why we see so little real, vital, genuine faith among the professing followers of the Gospel. The feelings, passions, and prejudices of the generality of men may be enlisted on the side of their religion, and easily aroused to resent any insult or slight offered to it. But they themselves all the time know and feel nothing of its blessed nature, neither are they walking under its holy influences. They put it on and off at their pleasure and convenience, like a worn glove or an old garment. They cling to the form of godliness, but have never learned to submit themselves to its power. And all this, I repeat, may be traced and ascribed to a want of meditation. Can a man be qualified for any earthly profession, trade, or calling without thought and meditation? What should we say of a man who set up for a soldier, and knew not how to use his arms? Or of a man who set up for a lawyer, and knew nothing about law?

Or of a man who set up for a farmer, and knew nothing about farming? And, in like manner, what must we say of him who calls himself a Christian, but yet knows nothing about Christianity? And so also the merchant, the tradesman, the shop-keeper, the mariner, the mechanic, the artisan, and the handicraftsman in every branch of labour must all devote some time and thought, some meditation, to prepare themselves for their several employments. Hence the necessity of an apprenticeship for some term of years, in which they may study and learn the secrets and mysteries, and all connected with the occupation upon which they are about to enter. And, even so, the probationer for eternity must devote himself to thought and meditation. Yes! brethren, you must ponder over the magnificence of God's power, the grandeur of God's works, the unfathomable depths of God's love. In the fields, with the book of nature spread out before you, meditate upon God's providence for your earthly comforts. In your houses, with the Book of Revelation open

before you, meditate upon God's love for your never-dying spirits. Meditate upon your past lives and your present conduct, and do not say "Hush" to the voice of conscience if it accuses you before the tribunal of your own hearts. Meditate upon God's omnipotence until you see Him in his power as you never saw Him before. Meditate upon the compassion of the Saviour until you love Him as you never loved before. Meditate upon Jesus and his cross until you find your hearts stirred within you and moved to serve Him, and then meditate upon them more and more, until, by the holy influence of grace, the change becomes more decided, and all your life, habits, ways, tempers, tastes, thoughts, words, and deeds are stamped with a Christian character. And so go on. Meditate and pray. Pray and meditate. Thus will you be prepared for that great meeting with your eternal Judge to which you may be summoned at any moment. The hour will soon be here when over the youngest and strongest now present shall be read the awful and solemn words, "Earth to

earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," as your mortal bodies descend into the yawning grave. And then what of your immortal souls? Meditate upon these things.

SERMON XIV.

THE GREAT WORK.

NEHEMIAH vi. 3.

“ And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down : why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you ? ”

THE restoration of the walls of Jerusalem by the Jews under Nehemiah, stirred up the fierce hostility and opposition of the neighbouring people. Old enmities were awakened and new jealousies stimulated. Their chiefs sought in every way to impede, to retard, to arrest, to prevent the progress of the work. They conspired, they plotted, they intrigued, they threatened.

They even advanced to such lengths, that they formed a plan for obtaining possession of Nehemiah's person, either that they might put him to death or hold him in captivity. We thus read in the opening verses of the chapter from which the text is taken: "Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." This sudden show of a more friendly feeling did not, it was not likely to, win the confidence of him to whom it was addressed. He knew that there was some snare under their plausible invitation. He writes, indeed, "But they thought to do me mischief." He was, therefore, too wary and wise to be so duped into their power. He adds, "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I

cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"

In studying this portion of the book and history of Nehemiah, we find that we are reading of an earnest and zealous man who, when he had a good work to do, set about it and kept to it with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. Duty was every thing to him. He was not to be frightened, won, diverted, or turned from it. He was just, in his walk of life, the type of what Christians ought to be in theirs. We will, then, look at him as our example in this discourse.

If Nehemiah was a worker for the earthly Jerusalem, we are sent into the world to be workers for a Master who is King supreme of the Jerusalem which is above. If Nehemiah had a great work to perform, we have a greater—the work of a Christian, the work of a true disciple, the work of a faithful and upright labourer in the Lord's vineyard. If to the invitation to desert his work, even for a time, Nehemiah answered, "Why should the

work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" we also should recollect the awful words in which Christ speaks of the backslider from the work which we have to do for Him, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

But with all this mighty work to accomplish, with our love of Christ to be proved, with our discipleship to Him to be established, with our faith in Him to be set forth beyond a doubt or suspicion, with his will to be obeyed, his example to be followed, his Gospel to be adorned, his cross to be made the seal of our salvation, what are the generality of professing Christians actually doing? When wooed from their duty by the sinners and sins, the triflers and trifles of the world, do they answer with the magnificent decision of Nehemiah, "We are doing a great work, so that we cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst we leave it, and come down to you?" I fear that, when measured by this standard, too many will be found undersized, if not positive dwarfs,

in their Christianity. I fear that, when we look at men as they really are, at their sayings and their doings, we must at once confess that by the large majority, the busy and bustling and sinful children of the world, the Gospel is only nominally professed, and most imperfectly appreciated. They interpret its principles after their own fashion, and torture and wrest its teachings to their own liking. They largely mix the dross of their own earthly mindedness with its heavenly gold. They add to it; they take from it. They embody its holy doctrines and glorious lessons in shapes of their own base moulding. Instead of seeking to ascend to its purity, they strive to degrade it to the level of their own grossness. Where are the men who are living to Christ and for Christ, instead of to the world and for the world? Where are the men who are the salt of the earth, whose great one thought is the glory of the Gospel, and whose great "one thing needful" is the salvation of the soul? Where are the men who would rather exalt the honour of God than their

own names, and who love their neighbour as themselves; who set heaven before earth, charity before money, purity before pleasure, and the love of Christ before every thing? Where are the men who with brave, stout hearts—brave, stout hearts, because prayerful hearts, strengthened by the Divine grace,—battle and wrestle triumphantly with the trials and temptations and allurements of the world, and still to all their calls reply, “We are doing a great work, so that we cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst we leave it, and come down to you?” I will not, I would not, say that no such Christian men are to be found. But they are not to be found easily nor in great abundance, while the men of an opposite character who are ready to leave “the great work” on the slightest invitation or the smallest plea, or who altogether neglect it, are to be seen crowding the broad way which leads to destruction. They swarm, they crush, they press, against each other, in the wild and terrible competition for the world’s smiles, the world’s

favours, the world's gifts, the world's unrighteousness. They are to be found in fearful multitudes in all classes of society alike. The plague is every where, raging, spreading, poisoning, killing. Walk where you will, go where you please, in town or country, street or lane, from sunrise to sunset, from week's end to week's end, and what manner of men are those whom you will generally meet with? Are their hearts set, fixed, and bent upon "the great work?" You will hardly see a hand devoted to it, hardly an eye turned to it, hardly a countenance brightened and lighted up with looks of happiness by it. The vast, wide, deep, black torrent of worldliness is sweeping them almost all with it. High and lowly, prince and peasant, rich and poor, statesmen, legislators, merchants, tradesmen, shopkeepers, employers and the employed, farmers, labourers, all ranks and classes seem to think of every work but "the great work." We look round for the true followers of Christ, and our eyes rest upon the wicked with his wickedness, the worldling with his worldliness, the drunkard

with his drunkenness, the swearer with his swearing, the scoffers, the scorers, the unbelievers, the slaves of mammon, the sabbath-breakers lounging or idling or openly sinning through God's day, earthly thoughts and schemes and plots jarring with the holy feelings which it ought to awaken, the aspirations of human pride drowning the inspirations of divine grace, neglected families, sinning families, prayerless houses, children brought up as heathens, their young hearts urged on by the example of their parents to precocious depravity, the world worshipped, heaven forgotten, the Holy Spirit rejected, Christ unheard, his cross despised, all this,—*all this*, and God and his holy angels looking down upon it continually.

But instead of generalizing in this fashion, let us go on to specify some of the particular instances in which men are tempted to leave "the great work" of the soul, and to accept the invitations of Satan.

In the first place, there is the spirit of worldliness, a messenger very frequently

employed by the arch-enemy of man to win him to destruction. It is especially dangerous when it seeks to fill the heart with a thirst for riches. When once the money fever seizes entirely upon the affections, it places its victim in a most perilous condition. The acquisition of more only incites him to a more painful craving after more still. The heart becomes gradually hardened in those who yield to this awful influence against all the calls of charity and benevolence. The idolatry of self is fully established, and its foul worship is made all in all with its votaries. Now this corrupting power of riches is one of those old truths readily seen and freely acknowledged by every man,—with a saving clause attached to his admission, that is, he at once admits all the danger in the case of others, but makes withal a flattering exception in favour of himself. “Yes,” he fondly allows, “money is indeed a bad thing in bad hands, but still it is a good thing in good hands, and when properly used.” I do not assail this man’s view of the case. I grant it.

“Money is a good thing in good hands, and when properly used.” But I would proceed to try him by his own standard. I would ask him what use he makes of the money which God has committed to his hands? Whether he employs it, as the steward of God, in relieving the wants of God’s creatures, his own fellow-creatures, or in gratifying his own pride and vanity, pampering his own selfishness, and ministering to his own luxury? But why all this care and anxiety and eagerness about heaping up riches? Even as regards this world, will money bring peace of mind? Will it give contentment? Will it buy health? Will it prolong life? When the mightiest conqueror whom the world has ever seen boasted of his empire, his power, and his wealth, that was at once a noble answer and a gentle rebuke contained in the poor man’s answer to him, “You cannot conceive how much happiness can be found on three acres of land.” In other words, happiness is from within, not from without. It is in the man himself, his nature and disposition, not in the extent

or amount of his possessions. Moreover, think of the end. When the man of a worldly spirit has gone on, through the few years of this life, adding house to house, field to field, and money to money, what will become of all his treasure? Can he take it with him? He must leave it then. The golden snow-drift, if I may so call it, will melt away or be scattered from his hand at the approach of death. And, oh, brethren ! ask yourselves, put it to your own hearts, urge the question home, whether you would not rather wish that the tears of the poor should fall upon your coffins than the exultations of your rejoicing heirs ? But it is as an affair between you and your Saviour-God that you should peculiarly look at this subject. Whenever, therefore, the spirit of worldliness is coiling round your affections and pressing its invitations upon you, pray for the divine grace to make you strong and stout-hearted, and dismiss the tempter with the words of Nehemiah, “ We are doing a great work, so that we cannot come down : why should

the work cease, whilst we leave it, and come down to you?"

But, farther, temptation has many other forms in which it will try to seduce you from "the great work" which Christ has given you to perform. There is the love of pleasure, a most potent instrument in the hands of Satan. There is the spirit of vanity hardly less so. There is the anxiety to substitute the rites and ceremonies of religion for vital religion itself, and so permit the soul to be cast away in the dead sea of formalism. There is spiritual pride. There is spiritual idleness. There is unbelief. There is scepticism. There is Sabbath-breaking. There is swearing. There is dishonesty. There is falsehood. There is evil-speaking. There is the body-killing and soul-killing vice of drunkenness. But in whichever of these shapes, or in whatever other, temptation approaches you, be ready to meet and repel it. Earnest in prayer, and arrayed in "the whole armour of God," refuse at once to listen to its voice, and drive it from you with the

answer, "We are doing a great work, so that we cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst we leave it, and come down to you?"

And here let me speak for a few moments on a subject which not only now, but constantly, presses heavily upon my mind, to those of the working classes among you who are parents. Have you ever thought what a mighty responsibility is contained in the very word? To train and educate their children for eternity is part of "the great work;" a great work, indeed, itself, which every parent has to perform for God. Now, how are you discharging this tremendous duty? Let us inquire. When we see the helpless infant nestling on its mother's breast, crowing in her arms, or sleeping on her knee, if we were to ask her whether she loved it, she would answer with brightening eyes, "Oh, how tenderly and well!" and she would add, perhaps, that she would lay down her life to shelter and protect it. And the father likewise, less gently it may be, but more proudly, would assert that nature was not less power-

ful in his heart. But does not the bird of the air equally cherish its young? Is not its instinct as strong as your love? With its wings it covers them from the cold. It watches over them by day and night. It guards them from every enemy. It brings them food; and all this goes on as long as their helplessness endures. But as soon as they are fledged and are able to fly and take care of themselves, it drives them from the nest and leaves them to themselves. And what do you do more than this? Do you do as much? In one case, certainly not. Your care of your offspring should be of a higher kind than that which we have seen extended to its young by the bird. The children committed to your guardianship have minds to be cultivated and souls to be saved. It is, therefore, an awful and lamentable spectacle to behold the thoughtlessness and indifference with which so many parents among the labouring class deprive their children of the advantages which the school offers, that they may gain a few pence from the premature toil of the almost

infants. A few pence for an immortal soul! whereas Christ's valuation of an immortal soul is thus given: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" But I must speak to you more at length about this neglect of your children's education. If we look only at this world, you are dealing most unjustly with them. The mind of man is every where being instructed and enlightened after a fashion which former ages never even dreamed of. He, therefore, who in these days keeps his child in ignorance, condemns him to be nothing better than a human machine, a thing of toil, a mere "hewer of wood and drawer of water" from the beginning to the end, a slave with just the liberty to choose his master, this and nothing more. But all this is trifling when compared with the danger to the soul of which I before spoke. The ignorant man must have his enjoyments. His mind is not enlightened to seek farther light. He cannot hold communion with God through his works.

He cannot read of Him or talk to Him in books, or trace his providence in the history of nations. The Holy Bible is sealed to him. His careless parents have made him as a blind man to all these things. What, then, shall he do? Intoxication and evil companions are at hand, and too often he falls before them. They are the end of the training which his father and mother bestowed upon him, and they are the beginning of woes unutterable both in this world and the next. And extend the advantages of education to your daughters as well as to your sons. We want a generation of educated wives and mothers. Ignorance in the female who is at the head of a family is the greatest affliction which can befall it. A house under such guidance will be only a den or sty, not a home, for the husband and children, who have, who are driven, to look for comfort and enjoyment abroad, and then all misery begins. Be persuaded, then, all you who are parents. Never for the sake of some small present gain deprive your children of the advantages of education. I know the strength

of the temptation. I know what is the pressure of poverty, all your want, all your need, all the difficulty of struggling with narrow means and circumstances. But against all this set the value of your children's immortal souls, of your own if you neglect them. Pray to be directed in this matter. Pray that you may be true-hearted and Christian-hearted men. Abraham gave his son to God. Would you yield yours to Satan? Is your answer ready? God grant that it may be, "We are doing a great work, so that we cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst we leave it, and come down to you?"

Finally, under a high sense of the importance of the work upon which he was employed, Nehemiah could not and would not leave it. Had it been otherwise, and he had accepted the invitation of his enemies, what would have been the consequence? He tells us where he says in the verse immediately preceding the text, "They thought to do me mischief." It might have been imprisonment, it might have been death, or it might have come

upon him in some other shape. But what if Christ's disciples "leave the great work" which they have to perform for their Lord and Master? Nehemiah had only before him the terror of men, "which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," while you are in the hands of One, the great and mighty God of heaven and earth, who "is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Pray, therefore, for his grace to guard and support you in every trial and temptation, and to keep you to the performance of every good work. Urgent and pressing is your need. Every hour which the clock strikes is another passing bell of time, a proclamation that we have travelled another stage towards the eternity beyond it. Oh, be more zealous in prayer! Oh, be more vigilant against all the wiles of the spirit of evil! To every invitation from sinners, to every call from sin, to every allurement and vanity of the world, have but one answer, and let it come from the warmth of an earnest, honest, and faithful heart, "We are doing a great work, so that we

cannot come down.” It is Christ’s work, given us to perform by Him who died upon the cross for our salvation. “Why should the work cease, whilst we leave it, and come down to you?” Why, indeed? Can you show us any reasons why? Not one, not one, while ten thousand times ten thousand might be urged for binding us to our heavenly Master and his heavenly work. It will suffice to mention one of them as I finish:—*Christ loved us, and therefore we ought to love Christ.*

S E R M O N X V .

GRACE.

GENESIS ii. 7.

“ And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and man became a living soul.”

IF we were to collect together all the sermons which have ever been preached, all the books which have ever been written, and all the arguments which have ever been urged by man, to prove the power of God, we should find that they do not, in their combined strength, so magnify and exalt it as does one single verse in God's own Book, the first of the opening chapter of the Book of Genesis: “ In the

beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The beginning here spoken of is the beginning of time. But what is time? It is a space, a period, an interval of hours, days, years, centuries, more or less, cut out of eternity. But what is eternity? It is, if I may so speak, time made dateless, spaceless, taken out of all marks, limits, periods, and intervals; time, in short, no more time, but prolonged into endless duration. An eternity to come we can comprehend. What is, may go on and endure—on, on, on—ever, ever, ever. But when we attempt to look back into the mysterious sublimity of an eternity of the past, no beginning, an existence which never was not, but always has been, the finite intellect of man is at once baffled and confounded. If, in the pride and presumption of our hearts, we ever boldly hoist sail and steer forth into the wide sea of speculation and conjecture on this awful subject, our powers of reflection are overborne at once, and we are driven back to the point from which we started. The very thought, indeed, exceeds the grasp

of the mind, surpasses understanding, and leaves the comprehension far behind. It is positively overwhelming, oppressive, painful, and brings the man who pursues it too far almost to the verge of distraction.

But we were speaking of the power of God. In the beginning of time we find the Omnipotent, who had been co-eternal with eternity itself, "creating the heaven and the earth." The work itself displays the mighty power of God. The manner in which it was performed exalts it yet more. When man has a work to accomplish, it occupies time; it requires care and toil and anxiety. But when God was the Creator, we read of no such slow and laborious process being necessary. He spoke the word, and the work was achieved. Thus we read that He said, "Let there be light:" and what happened, what followed? The result is thus briefly, but magnificently, told, "and there was light." And it was the same with the other parts of the creation. As soon as the Almighty has commanded their exist-

ence, we read, "and it was so." The instant that his will was declared, it was obeyed. In the hands of this Omnipotent God we are.

When we pass from the first to the second chapter of the Book of Genesis, we come, at the seventh verse, to the text: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." I intend, using this passage of Scripture as an illustration, to speak to you, in this discourse, of the doctrine of grace. But, first of all, that we may see and appreciate all its force as we proceed, let us look well and thoroughly at the description here given of the creation of man. "The Lord God (we are told) formed man of the dust of the ground." This was his bodily part. So far he was only, as it were, an image or statue in the hand of his Divine Maker. But what next? The work was now only half done. Was it left in this unfinished state? We read on, "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." The form of

dust was now something more and something better. The muscles began to play, the limbs to feel their power, the tongue, the eye, the ear, the senses, to know their part, the intelligence to work. The man was completed. "He had become a living soul," no longer a mere body of dust, but a living man, a living soul, with the breath of life, the breath of God Himself. What a tremendous thought is there in all this! When we, who are the descendants of this man so formed, so created, give ourselves up to sin and guilt, whom, what, are we dishonouring? We are not only disgracing our great origin, but we are making the temple of the body built by God Himself the temple of the spirit of evil. We are taking it from its owner and Creator, and giving it up to his and our worst enemy.

How our first parents fell, and were expelled from the garden of Eden, every Scripture reader knows. And when sin came, death came with it, and both were left as a sad inheritance by those through whom they were brought into the world

to their posterity to the end of time. But there was mercy also with the Most High, even while pronouncing sentence upon the offenders. The promise of salvation followed close upon the need of it. But something was yet wanting. How was man to grasp the great love of God thus extended to him? How was he to return with the prodigal to his Father's house? His nature had been changed by the fall. He had become sinful and corrupt, as a spiritual corpse deprived of the breath of spiritual life. It had to be breathed into him again. The golden sceptre of mercy was held out to him, but he had neither strength nor inclination "to draw near and touch the top of it." In the catalogue of human afflictions there is one almost too terrible to think of. We have read of persons so attacked. They have heard and known all that was passing around them, seen the most awful preparations made with reference to themselves, and yet, from some horrible rigidity of muscle and motion, some overwhelming paralysis of all power of action, have been unable,

by a cry, or a word, or a look, or a gesture, to make it known that they still belonged to this living world. And so it is with the spiritually dead man. He sees, he knows, he hears, he reads of, all that concerns him as a being with an immortal soul; that he is in sin, and of himself powerless to escape from it; that the sinner's doom is impending over him, and he has not strength to fly to a place of refuge; that Christ died for his salvation, and he cannot, does not even wish to, turn to Him. He has, in short, all the future, all his danger, all his need, pictured before him, and yet makes no effort, can make none, to shake off the fearful lethargy which presses upon and crushes all his faculties. And how is this? It is because the natural man is strong and all-powerful within him. It is because the natural man can only be overcome when God "shall breathe into him the breath of the spiritual life." Here we come to the doctrine of grace of which I spoke just now. Let us consider it. And, first of all, let us turn to the tenth article of the Church of England. We read

therein, "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength, and good works, to faith and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will." And the Church, in setting forth this doctrine, is a true interpreter of God's Word. It is drawn from the well of life, the fountain of divine truth. It does not rest upon the unsustained audacity of human assertion; it has not its foundation on the sinking bog of human authority; it does not come down to us soiled by the mud of human tradition; but is scriptural, scriptural altogether, and nothing but scriptural. The proofs are at hand, and are abundant. In the 51st Psalm, verse 10th, we have David thus praying for the divine help: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." In the fourth and fifth verses of the fifteenth chapter of the

Gospel according to St. John, our Lord Himself thus speaks, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." And again, in chap. vi. ver. 44, the Saviour says, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." And listen how out-spoken and plain-spoken the Apostle St. Paul is on this great doctrine of Christianity. In his Epistle to the Romans, viii. 8, he writes, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." In the fourteenth verse of the same chapter, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." In the twenty-sixth verse, "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought." 1 Cor. xii. 3: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." 2 Cor. iii. 5: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to

think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." Phil. ii. 13: "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Chap. iv. 13: "I can do all through Christ which strengtheneth me."

That the breath of the spiritual life must be breathed into us by God, in other words, the doctrine of grace, is fully established by these scriptural passages. The next question to be asked is, To whom will the help of the divine grace be extended? And here we are taught to understand all the value of that connecting link between earth and heaven, between man and his God—prayer. We are told in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke that, if we "ask, it shall be given us," that if we "seek, we shall find," that if we "knock, it shall be opened unto us," and that "our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." And at the eighth verse of the fourth chapter of the Epistle of St. James we read, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you."

Here we might stop, satisfied as scholars of God to learn just what it is the will and pleasure of our Divine Master to communicate on the subject of this great and mysterious doctrine, namely, that it is for man to pray, for God to give. But human audacity or curiosity is not to be thus silenced. The prying and peering spirit of man goes on to demand, How and in what way, in what manner, the divine grace works within us, and by what signs and tokens we are to recognise its indwelling and presence in our souls? But this is one of God's secrets into which the inquisitive mind of man cannot penetrate. He has many such secrets. We cannot tell how the acorn dropped into the ground becomes the mighty oak under which we find a shelter, and from which the cunning hand of the workman creates the navies of the world. But such is the fact. We know it and see it. We cannot tell how the tree rises again from its winter's death to its summer's glory. But such is the fact. We know it and see it. We cannot tell how the grain of wheat shoots up, first into

the blade, and then into the ear, and grows and ripens and becomes food for man. But such is the fact. We know it and see it. Who among you, again, as a thought flashes across your mind, can trace it to its origin and fountain head, and tell whence or how it had its beginning? And so it is with the working of the divine grace in the soul of man. God gives it to us as a precious gift, but the manner in which the Holy Spirit co-operates with and controls and guides the spirit of man, He reveals not to us. Our Lord Himself, indeed, refused to gratify human curiosity on this point. We read in the third chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, that "there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." With him our Lord spoke of the doctrine of grace, and of "the death unto sin and new birth unto righteousness" accomplished by its power. Nicodemus was astonished, and under the same inquisitive influence which rules over men now, ventured to ask of the manner in which such a blessed and glorious change

from darkness to light was effected. And what was our Lord's answer? Ponder over the remarkable words in which it was given. They shut the door against all human audacity and all human curiosity. They speak not of the breath of the spiritual life as a rushing hurricane pouring through the soul. They describe not the working of God's Spirit as if it were the great and strong wind, or the earthquake, or the fire which passed before the eyes of the prophet of Israel, but rather as "the still small voice" which he recognised at once as that of his heavenly Master. "Marvel not," answered our Lord, "that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The fact is asserted; the way in which it is brought about is withheld. Faith would no longer be faith if all spiritual things were made known to us.

But if God has not chosen to reveal to us the manner in which the Spirit of grace

works with the spirit of man, He has clearly and plainly declared to us what are the signs and marks by which we may discover that He is present with us. The tree is to be known by its fruits: Christ sets forth this test and shibboleth where He says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." And St. Paul emphatically teaches us in one place, that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" and in another, "the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." These are at once the ornaments and proofs of the Christian character. With them the life of the true disciple will be jewelled over as the sky is with its stars.

But the carping and quibbling mind of

man is not yet satisfied. It is a question often put, Is the rule here laid down universal, invariable, and infallible? Are there not exceptions to it? Although "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit," still may there not be something artificial produced; something which, to the human eye, is so fair an imitation of the original and genuine, that it is almost impossible for man to distinguish which is the reality and which the mockery? This may not be denied. Whited sepulchres abound. Many and different causes work together for such a consummation. Some men, from their natural dispositions, their tastes, and habits, are less inclined to shock the world than others. Some, from various motives, are anxious to keep up appearances. Some do so, being varnished over with the polish of education and civilization. Some act in obedience to the law, or out of deference to society. Some wish to trade upon a character for religion, and to make a profit of a show of sanctity. This, as I said before, may not be denied. But why should we waste our time, why

should we trouble ourselves, to find out which is the reality and which the mockery, which are the healthy and which the diseased spiritualities? Our part is to clothe ourselves with that "charity which believeth all things and hopeth all things." It is for God to decide who are the hypocrites,—not man. It is for God to judge them,—not man. What saith the Scripture on this point? "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." Our course is plain. Instead of mote-hunting in the eyes of others, we should devote ourselves to cast out the beam which disfigures our own. Every man has a soul, and every man's own soul provides him with a home-mission which, if he does the work well and thoroughly, will fully occupy his activity and vigilance, and leave him no time to cultivate that wonderful mistake which leads so many to believe that to discover a fault in their neighbour's character is to add a virtue to their own, and thus to build an ideal religion upon actual irreligion. But do so no more. God knows

who are his and who are not without your help. To Him the secrets of all hearts are open. He sees who are leading the life of grace, and who are only hypocrites and dissemblers. Leave it in his hands. Look at home. Enter upon the work of self-examination with prayer for the Holy Spirit to help you in it, and to keep you to it.

Yes, brethren, as I said before, every man's own soul provides him with a home-mission which demands all his inquisitive activity and vigilance, and which, filling us with humility as we discover our own frailties, should also fill us with charity towards others. Begin. Pray that the breath of the spiritual life may be at once breathed into your souls. Mighty and powerful is the grace of God, and great, and glorious, and magnificent have been its triumphs and conquests over the souls of men. It has recalled the prodigal to his father's house. It has won over the infidel to be a faithful disciple of "the truth as it is in Jesus." It has transformed the spiritually deformed into shapes of spi-

ritual loveliness and beauty. It has healed the spiritually sick, opened the eyes of the spiritually blind, and the ears of the spiritually deaf, and given a tongue to the spiritually dumb. It has reclaimed the sinner. It has converted the Sabbath-breaker into a strict observer of God's day, and a pious worshipper in God's house. It has persuaded the swearer to renounce his vice. It has made the dishonest man honest; the thoughtless, serious; the churl, charitable. Like an angel of mercy it has visited the drunkard, and lo, he has become sober, and so the married misery of the drunkard's wife has passed away, and so the hopeless, the homeless home of the drunkard's family has been changed into the cottage of content, as light and religion, illuminating the father, the example of the house, have spread and reached the other members of the domestic circle. So has the grace of God worked, so does it work, so will it continue to work. Fly to such a Helper, so mighty, so ever present, so ever willing to assist you. Pray for it. Submit to it. Follow it. And then, as at

the first, when "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man became a living soul," so now, when in answer to sincere prayer the same almighty Being breathes into you the breath of the spiritual life, you will rise, through grace, from the death of sin into a living faith, and become true disciples of Jesus Christ. Your mission will then have been accomplished, and you will be ready at any time to meet the summons to eternity with the words of good old Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

SERMON XVI.¹

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

GENESIS xxviii. 16.

“Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.”

THE life of Jacob, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, is one proof more to be added to the often made assertion, that truth is more strange and wonderful than fiction. We read it from first to last with an interest almost amounting to excitement. That he had his faults we know. It is sufficient to say that he was a man, and what man has them not? But his history is one which

¹ Preached in the new church at Amcotts in the parish of Althorpe, on the first Sunday after its opening.

every Bible reader should carefully study for himself. It will amply repay perusal. And if, while occupied upon it, you find that the faith of the patriarch, generally so bright and unclouded, was sometimes feeble or faltering, do not hastily and severely condemn him. At such seasons let shame do the work which charity ought to perform; look inwardly into your own hearts, and ask, How is it there? and then "let him that is without sin among you, first cast a stone at him."

I am not, however, going to dwell long upon the career of Jacob in this discourse; I shall only fix your attention upon that part of it which will bring us to the text, and help us fully to understand it. He was the twin brother of Esau, and the younger born. Before that event took place, we are told in the twenty-fifth chapter of the book of Genesis that it had been announced from the Lord to his mother, Rebekah, that "the elder should serve the younger." In chapter the twenty-seventh we come to a painful blot upon the character of the patriarch. His mother had

overheard a conversation between Esau and his father, in which the latter had said to the former, "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die." These words recalled to the mind of Rebekah the divine promise long since given in behalf of her younger and favourite son, and she instantly suggested to Jacob a cunning and deceitful scheme by which he might overreach his father, and obtain the blessing intended by him for his brother. Unhappily he listened to and acted upon this advice, and so presents himself, in this instance, before us in the character of a man with faith, and yet, if I may so speak, without faith, at the same time. He had faith in God's promise, but he had not faith in God's power. He felt assured of the blessing long since pledged to him by the Lord, but had doubts about the overruling inspiration

which should direct his father's words in dealing with his sons, and, therefore, must bring his poor, mean, human, miserable deceit and plot to help on the purpose of the Most High and Omnipotent God of heaven and earth. The sin was committed; the cheat was perpetrated; falsehood followed to avert discovery; and the darkest stain on Jacob's life is before us in all its foulness. We will not dwell upon it. We may not doubt that it was speedily followed by repentance and remorse. We may, indeed, speak with something like certainty on this point, seeing that when, for fear of the anger of Esau which he had incurred, he was about to set forth for Haran to dwell there with Laban, his mother's brother, his father Isaac, of his own free will, renewed and confirmed the blessing before obtained from him by fraud and artifice; and seeing farther, what is altogether decisive, that God Himself, in a vision and in the manner of which we are about to speak, ratified, as it were, with the seal of heaven, this glorious blessing. "Jacob," we read in the sacred history,

“went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”

What a picture of God's power and pro-

vidence and love have we in this passage of Holy Scripture, although expressed in language purposely made plain to suit the human understanding! There is the ladder connecting earth and heaven,—there are the angels ascending to receive the commands of God, and descending to execute them,—there is the Lord Himself “standing above it,” over all and before all, with his ever-watchful, ever-superintending eye, directing, ruling, guiding every thing, from the greatest to the least.

But there is much more yet to contemplate and consider before we pass on from the magnificent and interesting scene here set before us. Let the poor and lowly of this world, the wretched and afflicted, dwell upon it earnestly and seriously; for, with the divine blessing, they may derive from it great comfort and consolation. We are often told that man’s adversity is God’s opportunity, and so it was in this instance. Look at the condition and circumstances of Jacob at the time when this prophetic revelation and these astounding promises were vouchsafed to him. He was at what

is called the lowest ebb of human fortune. He was a wandering fugitive, self-banished by his own fault, from his father's house, the comforts of home, and the tender care of a too fond and affectionate mother, flying for his life, and about to ask for shelter and safety in a foreign land. On his way thither we find him alone, the sun set, the night come, with no couch to lie upon but the hard ground, his head pillowed upon a stone, the canopy of heaven his only covering, its stars the lights to guide him to his bed; the silence, the solitude, the desert on every side of him, mute, yet eloquent, preachers to him of the nothingness and impotence of man. Could helplessness and hopelessness go farther? But it was here, under these circumstances, that to this forlorn and desolate man, this poor wandering outcast, the Most High God revealed Himself, and gave promises of future greatness and grandeur such as human ambition in its most soaring and wildest flights has never yet ventured to aspire to. Both temporal and spiritual blessings were included in them. He now slept upon the cold and

hard ground. But it should one day belong to his seed. This was a foreshadowing of the kingdom of Israel. But the blaze of the spiritual blessing promised was far more dazzling in its glory:—"In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." There is the renewed promise of the Messiah, from the beginning to the consummation, when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Remember all this, I repeat, ye poor and sorrowing and afflicted ones of this world. God is always ready to draw nigh to you if you will draw nigh to Him. A man's circumstances make no difference in his dealings. In Lazarus He sees a being with an immortal soul. To Jacob, in the very extremity of distress, He speaks both of an earthly and a heavenly kingdom to be set forth and exalted in his seed. Be patient, then, resigned, and faithful. Life is short. Christ is merciful, heaven is near. Comfortless now, you will have all comfort then. But recollect, I said, if you were faithful. Certainly not otherwise.

We read on: "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place: this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

I shall go no farther into the history of the patriarch in this discourse, but strive, with the blessing of God, during the remainder of it, to draw from the words of the text those practical lessons which they seem to me so capable of imparting.

"Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." Brethren, ponder over these striking words. They probably represent a state of feeling which many of you have frequently experienced in the course of your spiritual life. How often in the house of God, where the strong, and overwhelming, and monopolizing conviction of your hearts should be, "Surely the Lord is in this place," have you practically been ignorant of his all-pervading presence. Bodily within the walls of his holy temple, yet have your thoughts been communing with

things beyond them, of the earth altogether earthy, when they should have been entirely of the heaven heavenly, immersed in calculations, plans, schemes, bargains, thinking of the profits or losses of yesterday, or anticipating those of to-morrow; man's work in God's house, or perhaps worse, Satan's work in God's house, revelling in the memory of sinful and unlawful pleasures, and with no intention but to sin again and sin on when the restraint of the Sabbath is removed. Or it may be that your religion has gone a little farther and studied appearances without, however, adding to them vitality and reality. You have been formalists to the letter, strict and exact observers of the outward rites and ordinances of the Church, regular in your attendance at public worship, and joining seriously in the services and prayers. In short, you say, you have omitted nothing. But have you felt any thing? Forms, and rites, and ceremonies are but, as it were, the ornaments, and fringe, and embroidery of the robe of righteousness, but it is in that robe itself that the dis-

ciple of Jesus must be arrayed. Have your hearts been in the work of which we are speaking? Have your hearts bowed down when your knees bent? Have your hearts prompted your tongues when they joined in prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving? Have you listened to the portions of Scripture read to you with a teachable disposition, as scholars of God, anxious to learn from his Book? Have you visited his holy temple in sincerity, earnestness, humility, and faith, to thank Him for his past mercies, and to implore his help, and guidance, and protection for the future? If not, then unhappily it may still be written against you, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and you knew it not." Your religion, as yet, is but like the cold fire in the grate. The live coal which is to kindle it has yet to be sought and applied.

But, for a few moments, let us leave the past to speak of the present. You are here assembled to-day for the first Sabbath within the walls of your newly erected church. And what are your thoughts to-day? Are they all that they should be?

or is there some leaven of worldliness fermenting within them? How have they been occupied since you entered these doors? Have you been thankfully rejoicing for God's honour, not for man's vanity, that you have now at last a fitting and becoming place of worship in which to assemble? or, with that pride which struggles to have the mastery of the human heart in all things, have you only been contemplating this temple of the Lord as something that will be an ornament to your village, or counting up how much, severally and individually, how much you have contributed towards its erection? What verdict do your hearts pronounce after a close self-examination? Are we still to say, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not?"

But let us spread the wings of thought and take a wider flight into the tremendous subject which opens for our consideration. When we say, "Surely the Lord is in this place," when we speak of his presence in his holy temples to which He summons his people to hold, as it were,

closer and more especial communion with Him, we do not mean to limit that presence, and to say that it is here alone and no where else. God does not reign with, if I may so speak, a divided presence, one part in this place and one part in another, or in this place at one moment and another at the next. But if we can comprehend the big thought, He is omnipresent, here, there, and every where, at one and the same time, filling all space, and infinite as infinity itself. He is the Universal, the Everywhere. He is GOD. That word expresses all that we can say and reach when speaking of Him. It is thus that He is described to us in the splendid and striking language of Psalm cxxxix. : “ Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit ? or whither shall I go then from thy presence ? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there : if I go down to hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea ; even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Peradventure the darkness

shall cover me; then shall my night be turned to day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day: the darkness and light to thee are both alike." What an influence ought this fearful and appalling thought of God's universal and all-pervading presence to exercise upon the wicked! Ah, sinner! at that time, when you were trying to overreach and defraud your neighbour—ah, sinner! at that time, when you were cursing and blaspheming, and taking God's holy name in vain—ah, sinner! at that time when, with evil and slanderous tongue, you were uttering falsehood and coining and circulating calumnies against the characters of your fellow-men—ah, sinner! at that time when you were making or taking seven week-days, and giving no Sabbath to God or your own immortal souls—ah, sinner! at that time when, with your fellow-drunkards, you were revelling in unhallowed merriment, and destroying yourself body and spirit with the cup of intoxication—ah, sinner! at that time when, under the shelter of

the silence and darkness of the night, you whispered your evil purposes to your wicked companions, or prepared them in your own mind ;—at that time, at all those times, God was there with you, and you “knew it not.” His eye was upon you, his ear was open, and He saw and heard all that you thought, said, or did. That you are still spared to have it proclaimed against you, is only another lovely proof of his heavenly mercy. An opportunity of returning to Him is yet with you. But how long? Seize upon it with prayer and thankfulness before “the night cometh, when no man may work.”

But there is one lesson more to be drawn from the text. You who live far removed from the crowded haunts of men, have many opportunities of communing with God in God’s works, which the multitudes pent up in towns and cities do not enjoy. Do you feel and appreciate the privilege? When you walk in the fields and on your farms, with all nature in its beauty around you, in seed-time or harvest, the crops growing or ripening, the

seasons coming and going, and the great blue vault of heaven above your heads, with its sunny sky overspreading and blessing all; when you stand by your river's side and listen to the gentle music of its rippling wavelets; when you hear the concerts of the birds, and the thanksgiving hymns of the winds as their voices swell among the branches of the rustling trees, or their thundering anthems when the storms are up to do the will of the Most High;—at such times, and on such occasions, have your hearts risen with them in worship and adoration? or have all these holy influences been lost upon you, God there and “you knew it not,”—his power, his mercy, his providence displayed before you and on every side of you, and you took it all for granted, looked upon it as all commonplace, all as a thing of course, for your gratification, your pleasure, your advantage, self occupying all your thoughts, the Lord of heaven and earth being in none of them? Your own hearts must answer this inquiry. May they do so happily and favourably.

Finally, brethren, you must observe that "Jacob awaked out of his sleep" before he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." And so it must be with every spiritual slumberer now. The sleep of sin must be disturbed before it ends in the sleep of death. It is thus that the Scripture warns us, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Awake!—but how? Arise from the dead!—but how? Come to Christ for light!—but how? In what strength and what power? By the grace of God promised to all those who earnestly and sincerely pray for it. It is to give seriousness and substance to such prayers that the Sabbath and house of God are most welcome. If properly observed and properly attended, they withdraw us from all the common thoughts of the common-day world. They separate us from the dust and dross of the life about us; from the whirl of business and the noise of the market; from the bitterness of evil speaking and evil thinking, professional envy, social jealousy; from all

worldly subjects whatever; and carry us, with the blessing of God, prayed for and given to our prayers, to higher, and loftier, and holier thoughts, more suited to the spiritual life within us. At all times, and in all places never forget that God is present with you; but still the soul's best banquet in this thought and feeling must ever be in God's own house on God's own day.

And now I dismiss you with three short lessons in three short words—Believe, Try, Pray. Unless you believe, you will never wish to be disciples of Christ. Unless you try, you will never succeed in becoming his disciples. And unless you pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, your belief will remain an idle, barren, useless principle, and you will never try either to adorn or obey the blessed Gospel. But believing, trying, praying, all three joined and met together in you, you will advance from strength to strength, and from grace to grace, until, this life over, all danger past and gone, the good fight of faith, the battle of the soul, fought and won, you

will cease from the world that now is, to be with the saints and angels, and God Himself, in the heaven of heavens for evermore.

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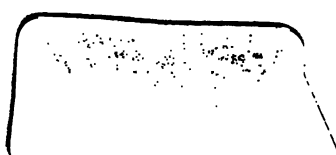
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